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THE FIRST SPRINGBOK PRISONER  
IN GERMANY











THE BATTLE OF DELVILLE WOOD.  
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*Frontispiece.*

# THE FIRST SPRINGBOK PRISONER IN GERMANY

BY

CORPORAL E. DOITSH, 1st S.A.I.

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## PREFACE

IT is usual amongst authors to make some elaborate statement as to their reasons for writing a book; but though I have set out in the following pages what is surely as exciting an account of adventures as will satisfy the thirst of any ardent reader of fiction, I can find no reason for having done so save that people in South Africa, and maybe elsewhere, will read with interest the story of one who has travelled from the Cape to Richmond via Egypt, South-West Africa, France, and Germany, losing in the journey a leg and much blood, but not one whit of the enthusiasm which has called into being a mighty army, eager to strafe the Hun and avenge his many misdeeds.

I shall set forth in detail, without descriptions of scenery, etc., which have been better penned by more expert writers, my adventures from the time of leaving Cape Town on September 20, 1915, until my arrival in the South African Hospital, Richmond Park, Surrey.

My qualifications as an author are indeed limited, but as against this I set my experience as a soldier—three years' service in the South African



## Preface

War; the campaign in Egypt and South-West Africa; Delville Wood, of blessed memory ! where I was taken prisoner by the Germans.

I shall show in plain language what the German hospital in Northern France was like; you will see the hospital in Germany where my leg was amputated; and you will know the horrors and the humours of a prisoners' camp in Germany.



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# THE FIRST SPRINGBOK PRISONER IN GERMANY

## CHAPTER I

### SOUTH-WEST AFRICA

WHEN war came about between England and Germany, naturally we Britishers in South Africa knew we had a war to fight at our very gates. So on the appeal for volunteers by our illustrious statesman-soldier, General Botha, I responded to the call. It was on a beautiful sunny day in the beginning of January, 1915, that I made my way to the drill-hall. Two days later I found myself in uniform, and in camp at Cape Town, together with 5,000 Transvaal and Free State farmers, who patriotically had come forward. Life among the motley but genial crowd was rather amusing.

It was my first experience in close touch with the back-veldter. For the majority it was the first trip to a coastal town. The sea was a wonder to them all. One morning, on going for a short stroll down the beach at Three Anchor Bay, I came across two of them discussing the best way of sending a bottle of sea-water to their vrous on the farm. "Look here," I said, "I can see that you understand mighty little about the sea. If you wish to see your bottles arrive at their destination safely, you will have to empty each of them to just

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about half the quantity." They exclaimed "Why?" in astonishment. "Well," I replied, "you do this in order to allow for the high-tide coming in." And they believed it.

A few evenings after I was at the same place contemplating a bathe. The tide was out. I overheard one of the farmer-soldiers remark: "I was here this morning, and wanted to get some of the sea to send to my wife. Seeing a fisherman in front of the boat-shed, I asked of whom I would have to obtain permission to take a bottle of water. He told me he was selling it at a shilling per bottle. I bought one, and think he must have done a good trade, as when I obtained it from him the water was touching the boat-shed, and now look how empty it is."

On the boat journey to South-West Africa a month later, I discussed all manner of topics with these interesting but very simple men. One asked me what the war was about, and, after explaining it to him, I further informed him that England was fighting Germany on French soil. He opened his eyes in astonishment, and said: "I thought King Edward was a man of peace." On telling him that King Edward had been dead a number of years, he replied: "This is the first I have heard about it. Who is King now?" I informed him that good King George V. was King. He replied: "I suppose making him King is some more of the patriotic work of General Botha." It was a fund of good experience fighting side by side with these excellent fellows, and their performance of their duty to their country when once aroused was magnificent.

Swakopmund, our first goal, reached towards the end of February, was evacuated after a few shells had been put into the German town by two



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armoured cruisers. The town itself, a masterpiece of German cleverness, was built practically upon sand-dunes, which run for about eighty miles into the interior. The sand in and around Swakopmund is 8 to 10 feet deep, and the town itself is an actual demonstration of the grit of the German colonist. One would imagine no sane community in its wildest dreams would ever think of settling there. But there it is, a town comprising well-surveyed streets, magnificent business premises, commodious and well-laid-out residential edifices. It had evidently boasted a well-organized municipality. I was quartered in premises of pre-war days, the principal office and dwelling abode of the staff of the Woermann Steamship Company of Hamburg. The change from a sandy bed in a tent to a cosy room and bed-cot with feather mattress, and a gramophone (stamped "Made in Germany") to keep me company, together with the usual appointments that go to make up a well-furnished bedroom, made we feel I was almost Commander-in-Chief, if not a miniature Napoleon all on my own. I spent a matter of nearly a month in Swakopmund, while plans were being matured. In some well-kept houses I visited were evidences, such as half-eaten meals upon the table, of the hurried departure of the enemy.

It did not take the boys long to find out that a quantity of good cheer in the shape of whisky, rum, and gin, had been left by the Germans in the bonded warehouse at the wharf, and a good and merry time there was while the stuff lasted.

The Germans at this point had dug themselves in about eight miles out, and on the great move forward with a column of about 20,000 men, all mounted, they considered discretion the better part of valour, as evidenced by their hurried de-

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parture from this position. We had, as we learned from aeroplane reconnaissance, to make a journey of about sixty miles through desert to encounter the enemy, who had taken up a strong position in the mountains around Riet. This was the only watering-place between Swakopmund and the enemy position, so a dash had to be made for it. The conflict was of a very exciting nature. Part of our column, through intelligent information, interrupted a train packed with reinforcements for the enemy which had come down from Windhoek. The whole train's company surrendered on finding themselves cut off. The main body, after a good set to, in which for the first time in warfare I had witnessed mounted troops charge a mountain, had an exciting experience. I, together with a Staff Captain, had a rather exciting time. Prior to the engagement, as the horses were badly in need of water, we set off into the bed of the underground river in search of some, when we unexpectedly found ourselves amidst a small party of the enemy. They called upon us to surrender and said we were their prisoners. Captain —, taking in the situation, replied: "I have come here on a mission from the General, to ask you all to surrender, and will give you two hours in which to decide." This clever move aided us in getting out of their clutches.

When the enemy had fallen back, and were presumably at a good distance, we consolidated the position won. Water was, however, our first need, for both man and beast had existed without this precious commodity for thirty-six hours. The water-supply was discovered, but, to our intense disgust, we found that the enemy had poisoned it, and this entailed a delay of several hours. Thanks, however, to the energy of the South African



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Engineers Company, a supply, though a limited one, was obtained.

After a couple of months' further preparation—and elaborate preparations have to be made for a campaign in a desert—the next advance was made, a move forward of eighty miles, in which the endurance of both men and animals was taxed to the uttermost. The march, except for a certain amount of sniping on the part of the enemy, was comparatively uneventful, and on reaching the farther point, the water-supply was found to be very meagre indeed. The source was a small hole, hurriedly dug by our men, and, as the stream of water was small, great difficulties had to be overcome. A tin pint mug had to be brought into use, and the reader can imagine for himself how long it took to water about 25,000 men and the same number of animals. Suffice it to say we arrived at this spot at daybreak, and at midnight men were still lining up in a queue to receive their allowance.

Our next move took us to Karibib (a very fertile portion of the country), and the delight of the poor beasts at seeing water running in streams down the streets, and abundance of grass to feed upon, was very evident. Truly, they must have felt that once again they were back in their native surroundings. Here we managed to take German railway and stores.

Our next move was in the final dash for Windhoek, and within about eight miles of the capital the Burgomaster came riding out with his staff under a flag of truce and surrendered the town. A Military Governor was installed, and, as the remaining number of enemy troops had fallen back into the Waterburg range of mountains, a distance of 200 miles, a hard task was in front of us. This

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had to be negotiated in stages, as was the case in the previous march. After encountering endless hardships to both man and beast, the enemy were rounded up and surrendered to General Botha. The country from Windhoek to the Waterburg was fairly good, and fine pastoral land could be observed on all sides.

One unpleasant incident which is worth recording took place on the march. A party of Engineers in search of water ran upon a land-mine, and a number were blown up.

The Damaraland natives, and also the Hereros, a great number of whom the Germans had cunningly enlisted on their side, began to desert them, and came over to us. We did not employ natives to fight the Germans; all that was required of them was loyalty. They seemed very pleased at the prospect of a change of government and to be taken out of the hands of their German masters, who had been forcing them to a life of subjection and oppression ever since they had acquired the colony of South-West Africa. From a purely agricultural point of view the colony does not offer particularly bright prospects, but in some respects it has exceptional advantages. For cattle-breeding it would prove second to none. The mineral wealth of the colony is too well known to need any comment. The copper-mines at present existing are well equipped and highly productive.

After the conquest of the colony the troops were returned to Cape Town. The first part of the journey of twenty-five miles to Walfish Bay was accomplished on a railway track which was laid on shifting sand of the beach, reminding one somewhat of a switchback railway. The scene along this line from Swakopmund to Walfish Bay, our landing-place, suggested Henley Regatta, only on



## South-West Africa

a larger scale. The beach was occupied by a large number of our troops, and, tents not being available, they had to find other shelter from the sun, the temperature registering 120° in the shade. The spoils of the drapery establishments of Swakopmund answered the purpose admirably. Broom-handles, rakes, and even the rifle, were brought into use as tent-poles. These were covered with all manner of ladies' dress materials, coloured prints, and tablecloths of all colours, the *tout ensemble* being a gaudy though strikingly picturesque scene. Some of these temporary coverings were arranged in a very comical way. One, for instance, had a board at the entrance bearing this notice, "Little Willie's Infants' Emporium"; another, "Kaiser Bill's Millinery Establishment; also at Kaiser Wilhelm Strasse, Berlin"; another, "Von Hindenburg and Co., the rag-dealers"; and yet another, "Von Tirpitz, expert corset-maker."

The bay at Walfish Bay is almost unequalled by any in the world; in fact, Sydney Harbour is probably the only one to equal it in size and natural adaptability. This being the British portion of the territory, all the northern force landed here, and departed through this way. But for a naval station and necessary wooden huts for use of the men, with one solitary trading store, nothing else existed here. But it is now in for a transformation concurrent with the war, and will be a place of importance in the near future. The return journey of the boat occupied three days. I have taken the reader on a flying trip through this new territory brought under our control so recently by the success of the Union Jack; but to try and describe in detail the general experiences of the campaign would be futile on my part, as it has been so well set out in other publications.

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My readers might like to hear of another experience I had with the Boer farmer. A new arrival in camp inquired from me where he could have a wash. I directed him to an ablution place specially fitted up for our convenience, and showed him the shower-baths. I happened to take a stroll into one of them a little later, and saw the individual soaking wet with all his clothes on, soap in hand, making desperate efforts to wash his hands and face from the falling water from the overhead shower. He exclaimed to me: "Just like the silly Englishman! Just fancy placing a tap right up there!"

I arrived back in Cape Town on August 6, and on the 13th answered the call for a representative South African brigade and joined up, thus having a break into civilian life of seven days.

## CHAPTER II

### THE DEPARTURE FROM CAPE TOWN

THE long train journey had at last come to an end, and at dawn on September 20, 1915, our troop train steamed into Cape Town. The prospect of a satisfying stretch for the legs, and other blessings not lightly to be spoken of, brought that radiant beam of satisfaction once more on all faces.

To many Cape Town had close associations, and all seemed eager to register clear impressions of this farewell visit to the mother-city. To our disappointment, Table Mountain and the city were covered by a haze which seemed to clothe its beauty with a dark sombre mantle.

Few people were aware that troops from Potchefstroom training camp were due that morning, but as we passed slowly through the city, stopping finally alongside one of the huge Customs sheds which overlook the docks, small groups in animated conversation forgathered.

Moored alongside, in stately altitude, was . . . . the boat that would shortly take us across to England. A "chain" was formed by the boys, and rifles handed from one to the other to be stacked in the ship's armoury, after which we marched on to the boat, to our allotted places. The order came for all to remain seated. General Thompson came round to bid us farewell, and his cheery words will ever remain firmly impressed upon our memories: "Good-bye, boys! God-



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speed and good luck! My only regret is that I am not coming with you."

Before the ship finally sailed we were allowed to go on the quay, where by now a huge crowd had gathered, in spite of the close guarding of the entrances and admission by special permit only. It rained in torrents, but no one's ardour was damped. Was there ever such a send-off? The band played patriotic airs, tugs skimming over the waters merrily tootled their strident sirens; winches and cranes, both large and small, squeaked and clanged in unmusical medley; carts and waggons in never-ending streams discharged baggage of divers descriptions; and through it all were to be heard scraps of merry and oftentimes earnest conversations between those about to depart and others who must stay behind. Good luck and God-speed! and with many a mother and many a sweetheart an anxious wonder as to when and how their loved ones would return. Who amongst us could say what the morrow would bring? Yet the boys seemed merry, optimistic, and cheerful, and more than one was heard to say: "By Jove! what a day it will be when we return! What a great reception we will get!" Alas! how many of the lads who said or thought this are now peacefully sleeping in heroes' graves within the quietude of shattered but glorious Delville Wood!

At last, mid sounding gongs and the cry of the sailor, "All aboard!" we started. What a sight! The crowds of cheering, waving friends and relatives; the eager faces of the boys on the ship; why, even the Lion's Head appeared in actual reality to look down with pride at the brawny sons of the veldt, as much as to say: "Well done, South Africa!" It is well that such excitement obtains in scenes such as this, for under many a smiling

## The Departure from Cape Town

face was a tremulous heart: it is hard to tear oneself away from loving wife or sweetheart.

The good ship was soon well under way; and Table Mountain becoming smaller and smaller, until it could no longer be seen, we turned our attention to the many things necessary for comfort on the voyage.

We had many interesting incidents. The most amusing was the ceremony of "crossing the line." The uninitiated willingly paid their threepences for the use of the telescope through which the "line" was plainly seen, and there in all his pomp and majesty appeared Father Neptune, with patriarchal beard and trident of office. It is difficult to say which were the more amused—the lookers-on, or the victims when they discovered that the equatorial line, which they could swear they had seen, was nothing more nor less than a piece of thread.

The signalling gave rise to many weird impressions; but no submarines were visible, and without mishap of any kind we reached Plymouth in the early morning, where we entrained for Borden Camp.

Two months' vigorous training gave us that confidence which is such an asset to a regiment, and Christmas, 1915, found us fit and eager for the fray. Christmas was a great time at Borden. Huts were gaily decorated with bunting and holly, and full justice was done to the extra Christmas fare, so generously donated by an anonymous South African. If we do ever know his name, we shall most certainly thank him for the great generosity which did so much to make us happy at this time. Queen Mary inspected the battalions, and right glad were we to have the opportunity of seeing Her Majesty.



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While on a few days' leave in London, we received a telegram instructing us to return immediately. And now ensued a time of great activity and excitement, a packing of kits and the making of final arrangements. So far we were ignorant as to our destination, but the arrival of pith helmets gave rise to a belief that we were bound for Egypt.

At 8 p.m. on December 27 we commenced our journey to Plymouth, stopping at Exeter, where the Mayoress graciously handed out refreshments. In the wake of the other troopships we left the harbour. When three days out the Brigade Major came to the sergeants' mess for a quiet, business-like chat, impressing upon us the necessity for seeing that all commands were obeyed absolutely to the letter.

## CHAPTER III

### EGYPT

EGYPT, the land of mystery, is to my mind the most fascinating of all places on earth.

Our brigade arrived there in the winter, in the month of January. There are two seasons in Egypt: winter and summer—six months of each.

The boys were greatly charmed with the quaint scenes noticeable during our progress to the encampment, a distance of some four miles from the town of Alexandria. The camp was situated behind the forts of the older period, which show signs of the 1881 bombardment of this city.

The first sight was a camel carrying half a house on its back, and, curiously, it seemed to relish its burden. Then came the Oriental sights in the town proper: the quaint roofless buildings, the curious narrow streets of the Arab and Moslem section of the community, the large number of mosques, the native bazaars. And then the European section of the town, with up-to-date and magnificent architectural structures, both residential and otherwise, was presented to my view. The street scenes in general, where the motley crew bargained their wares in true Eastern style, were indeed picturesque, the veiled Turkish and fellah women in their quaint native costumes adding to the charm of the scene. All this made our lads realize that there are other places beyond their own particular "cabbage patch." The



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sensuous aroma of the East had enchanted them. Little did most of us know that a city consisting of 300,000 people, and Cairo a hundred miles away, boasting a population of 600,000 people, existed in the sub-continent. Everywhere we journeyed fresh scenes opened before our eyes in bewildering variety.

It is the land of the donkey; and very poor specimens they appear to be, but for work they cannot be surpassed by the larger type to be found in other countries. The same applies to the Arab horse.

I pictured myself once again going through an English experience of a donkey ride; no one walks here when the useful donkey is to be found in untold numbers. The street Arab hawker carries on his business by the aid of a donkey. Human transportation is invariably dealt with in this way. The donkey is quite the pet of the household, and is to be seen in the poorer neighbourhoods sharing the food with the Arab and his family, squatted upon the ground; and the scene is added to by other possessions of the Arab, the pigs and fowls, and in some cases the dog and cat, all feeding together.

I am taking the liberty of saying that Alexandria is the most immoral town I have ever been in; vice and virtue go hand in hand, and the well-known quarters of some of the Continental cities are put into the shade in Alexandria.

At times the stench of the streets is positively abominable, and I have been puzzled to know why an enlightened Egyptian Government has never tried to alter this state of affairs. Apart from its vice, it is a wonderful and prosperous city.

The most gruesome sight I witnessed was during the visit I paid to the Catacombs. Here the

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pillar of Pompey first greets one, with two statues of the Sphinx. It is a mystery to this very day. However did the Egyptians of 2,500 years ago erect this? Cranes and modern building machinery were unknown in those far-off days.

I descended into the tombs, in some places 100 feet below the surface of the ground, and it made me feel quite creepy when inspecting the coffins, all made in stone, of the departed Roman Kings and Queens. There were apertures in the tombs where the municipal authorities have inserted electric light to enable one to see the bones inside. In those dark days they also buried their favourite horse or donkey with the corpse, and I gathered some very gruesome relics of my visit of a donkey's hoofs that had undergone the process of decomposition since the remote ages. I witnessed the coffins that were dug out in the place for the reception of infant corpses, which were all buried in a sitting position. Of the buried ones that were here deposited, nothing now remains to satisfy the appetite of those gruesomely inclined, but the bare space that was allotted each infant. I ventured down farther in another section of the Catacombs, with the help of an Arab guide, and stopped for a few minutes to inspect the place with one of my comrades in the place of my escort. We wandered on in absolute darkness, when unexpectedly we found ourselves at the bottom of a flight of narrow stone steps, about twelve in number, which I negotiated head over heels. I soliloquized somewhat in this fashion: "Herein be the remains of ancient Egyptian Kings and Queens, but by Jove, old chap! if you are not careful, a modern son of the South will perchance leave his remains here also." We both considered it wise to remain where we were until the return of our guide with his lamp.



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Upon his appearing we felt greatly relieved, and were not at all sorry when once more we set foot outside this gruesome but interesting link with Egypt's past rulers.

Among other relics to be seen here, I came across numerous old pitchers and other articles of early Egyptian pottery, and was astonished at the solidity of the material used. The old Roman well, which descends for hundreds of feet, is well worth seeing. I am not endeavouring to write a history of this mysterious country or elaborate upon the wonders to be witnessed—that is not the purpose of this book—for to do so would require years of association with the people, its enterprises, and its government, and I would shrink from so great a task. I saw the museum where the mummies of the far-off past, in a state of good preservation, are kept, and also pottery of almost every article imaginable. The street scenes in the better quarter of Alexandria, with its gaily lit-up tea-room and its fashionable patrons, French, Greek, and British, are a most alluring spectacle. Alexandria can boast a splendid electric tram service, and to one in khaki the cheapest ride in the world is a distance of eight miles for the modest sum of half a piastre (in English coinage  $1\frac{1}{4}$ d.).

In all Government services and private enterprises I saw only Egyptians employed. There is evidence in abundance that in the past Egypt had been mismanaged, and was the home of corruption, a happy hunting-ground for the money-lender aided by legal twisters—and their names were legion.

To-day Egypt is well governed, and more prosperous than it has ever been in its history.

It is a country for a clever engineer, a skilled mechanic, a good soldier.

## Egypt

Among the hamlets of the Arab, the Bedouin, and the Egyptian, extending from the Nile to the great Delta beyond, the wise men were saying to themselves: "There can be no rebellion; the South Africans are too strong." "What men! what guns!" said one old priest to another; "Allah is against us! These men are not dogs; they are great." So said they as the South Africans marched over the baked roads. They were treading a great road made by a great Khedive so that his good consort could visit the Pyramids in comfort. Napoleon had been here, Gordon and Kitchener also, and many an unnamed hero, too. Now the South Africans found themselves upon the threshold of a new mission; the task set them was not a mere walk-over.

A section of the Bedouins and Senussi that had travelled from Morocco and Tripoli, influenced by an alluring offer from the Kaiser, of a northern empire for the Egyptians, and assisted with materials of war and money, embarked upon an enterprise that might have upset all Egypt. The movement required stern measures to nip it in the bud. From the outset, on landing, it was rumoured among us that we had not been drafted here for garrison duty, as we at first suspected, but to quell the abominable piece of mischief inaugurated by the Berlin War Lord. Pharaoh had tried in vain to conquer Egypt, and it therefore makes it all the more difficult to fathom what was in the brain of the Kaiser in venturing this. It did not take many months to impress on his delicate brain the utter failure of his plans. The South Africans were out to win. It was a hard task, but they grappled with the situation and quitted themselves like men. A 180-mile march had to be endured. The brigade set out upon its work, starting from

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Mersa Matruh, a distance of 150 miles from Alexandria, on the western frontier of Egypt, because a desert had to be traversed in order to reach the goal. The capture of Solum, bordering upon the Italian territory of Tripoli, was accomplished. The only practical transport that could be adopted was that of the camel, and the way in which our boys succeeded in mastering the idiosyncrasies of this beast of the desert constituted a wonderful feat, a splendid achievement.

After an inspection, our brave boys set out on the morning of February 14, in a baking sun, which had thoroughly endowed them with that brick red complexion which seems to colour all newcomers, to the strains of the bagpipes.

Our progress over the burning plains of Egypt required stamina almost superhuman, and it was made more burdensome by the scarcity of water. The march averaged from twelve to fifteen miles a day. The Senussi and Bedouins were in front scheming all they knew, retiring as we progressed. At a place called Wadi-Maktil, a distance of about eighty miles from our base, we were ordered not to expose ourselves, but to keep well behind the sand-heaps, which run a good distance along the beach and afford the only available cover.

It all seemed so strange to me. I was in the water bathing, the evening following the afternoon of our arrival, disporting myself in the cooling breakers, and relishing the delights of a wash after marching for eighty miles, encountering many dust-storms only known in Egypt and the Libyan Desert, when to my utter surprise I found shells dipping their noses into the surf beside me, and considered a hurried exit necessary. I attempted to dry myself, but the shells came over fast and furious, so I dressed myself as I was; there was no



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time to lose. The enemy had got wind of our presence here, and had brought up their 9-pounders into operation; knowing the lie of the country, they had our range gauged with the first shell. One poor chap had half his head blown off; another had a shell burst between his legs, necessitating amputation. We found ourselves in the position of rats in a trap; the situation had to be firmly dealt with.

Upon my company marching out into the open country, quite barren of all cover, the enemy managed to get their guns away. If Mahomet would not come to the mountain, then the mountain had to go to Mahomet, and I am inclined to fancy Mahomet did not appreciate the visit.

We moved off at three the following morning in darkness, and our feelings will be readily understood by anyone who has experienced a pilgrimage similar to that here depicted. The darkness of a winter night in a desert, a wily and treacherous enemy hovering round, sometimes behind our column, sometimes on our flanks.

The music of our big guns commenced a selection upon the position in which the enemy had dug themselves in, to resist stubbornly our march on to Solum. It was not long before we were within rifle range of them, and then the fun began. The noise of the clanking rifles, the ping of the speeding bullets, turned the hitherto peacefulness of the desert into pandemonium. The enemy fought a gallant and heroic fight and hung on well. Not until we had pommelled and plastered them with shot and shell for about eight hours did they yield to our better firing and a well-judged bayonet charge. They left a goodly number of prisoners with us, but a good number of their dead they managed to carry away with them. Being

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fanatics, their beliefs are strange. For instance, it is the greatest honour to them to die on the field of battle. To die in this manner is to them a sure road to heaven. To die a coward's death or to surrender to an enemy takes them to the lower world; hence their bravery and endurance. Could any of my readers picture a more heroic action than this? Our company cook with myself spotted one of the enemy taking a pot shot at our platoon Lieutenant from behind one of the Arab tents that they had left behind in their encampment, prior to their evacuation. In the excitement, the cook was at too close quarters to fire, so hurriedly began to fix his bayonet, which did not catch. He rushed upon the enemy and thrust the bayonet into him; but the action of withdrawing it left the cold steel in the man, who quite calmly withdrew it from his abdomen smothered in blood and returned it to his assailant. Cook wanted to finish him off, but I interposed and said: "Let him live; he is too good a man to die." We left him lying there, and intended coming back to take him prisoner, but I heard, from others coming on behind us, that he died.

It was a treat to witness the young lads in our brigade for the first time under fire. Every man jack of them acquitted himself like a hero, going into the fray as if lining up to receive his pay.

The beautiful blue sky on a clear Egyptian winter's day was turned almost into crimson. The battle was fast and furious, but owing to the enemy's bad shooting and antiquated weapons, the casualties on our side were not great. Some of the rifles I picked up on the field were even older than some I have seen in the British Museum. They must have been used in Pharaoh's time! The fire seemed gradually and gradually to die

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away, and at about seven that evening the enemy seemed well back, and of course the task of mustering together and trying to find our regiments was no small matter. On my road to find my regiment, I witnessed one of the best natural war paintings it has been my lot to see. The picture was of Gaffar Pasha, the enemy Commander-in-Chief, a Turk, being escorted by an officer into our lines on a horse led by an orderly. The officer's head was tied up in a bandage through which blood was trickling. The chief was likewise wearing a blood-stained bandage. I learnt that the two had had a most desperate encounter, our officer being the ultimate victor. He told us that the Turk would not surrender, and put up a plucky fight, firing at his head with his revolver. The officer retaliated by slashing him with his sword, inflicting a deep gash running from armpit to wrist, and eventually overpowering him.

On my way to find my regiment, I ran into a small party of the enemy all on camels, crossing the field and coming towards me. On seeing me they wheeled round, and seemed to be making in a flanky direction. I did not feel that it was altogether a case of odds against me, as other men were making for my direction. As I got within a certain distance of them, I called upon them to stop, which they did. I moved up farther and ordered the leader to dismount. He appeared very stubborn, so I shouted: "Get off, or I'll blow you off!" Seeing I meant business, by the action of bringing my rifle to the ready, he acquiesced. I thereupon ordered him to mount again, and I noticed that he shook his head rather angrily, so I shouted to him, "Get on again, or I'll blow you on!" again bringing my rifle up, when he gave way. I kept them there until a few more of our men came along, and



## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

we made them prisoners. I then left, and proceeded on my way to find my regiment. I had not had a morsel of food to eat the whole day, carrying something like 90 pounds in kit, for drink one bottle of water, which had been disposed of very early in the fight. When I saw a number of dark objects coming over the skyline, I waited a while until I could discern that they were riderless camels, coming in my direction. On their near approach I could see that they were heavily laden, and upon their coming close up I observed that they were led by an Arab. I questioned him, and found out that he had been chased into our lines, and was coming in to surrender. He brought with him the enemy's whole commissariat department, in the nature of large bags of dates, two on each camel. He must have focussed my wishes, for he offered a dainty morsel, and a goodly quantity at that, which, being ravenously hungry, I quickly consumed. He did not act on ceremony in unloosening one of the bags in a proper manner, but did it the quickest way by hacking it down with a knife. I first filled my helmet; but this was not sufficient, when I came to think that my comrades had mouths as well as I, so relieved the valise, upon my back, of my greatcoat, and filled that up as well.

I eventually found my battalion, and the boys had a treat that night. The day was not yet finished for surprises. On making for one of the Arab wells near our camp that night, in company with one of the men, my mate was lowered down the well, by me, with a rope, and to our surprise he found himself being gripped by one of the Senussi, who had been in hiding there. After a deal of hugging, in which my mate managed to relieve him of his weapons, I hauled him up. This



BRITISH PRISONERS IN GERMANY.

The Author is on the left on crutches: the middle figures are those of the Russian doctor and staff.

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accounted for another prisoner. The brigade slept that night in the open without any blankets, owing to the slow progress of our camel transport, which did not catch us up until the following day. I could not sleep, but indulged in the happy pastime of chewing dates, squatting with others before a fire made of twigs. My readers will not be surprised when I tell them the doctor was urgently required the next day to set our stomachs in order again. We remained here two days in order to collect any stragglers and bury our dead. I witnessed the sad sight of seeing a large number of our dead that were brought in from farther afield, and their bodies had been relieved of all clothing, even the identity disc. The bodies had been mutilated after death, some with skulls beaten in and only part of the head left, the face being missing, others with their insides taken out, and some with fingers and ears missing. This act of mutilation after death is also part of the fanatical beliefs of these tribes.

We moved on farther to a place called Sidi Berani, capturing unopposed this coastguard station. The Egyptians, though in the employ of the Government, had turned traitors, and, taking a number of camels, had gone over to the enemy. We camped here for a few days, during which time we had to send men back to bring forward the bodies of the dead we had buried, because the Senussis had disinterred them. The information came through to us from those following on. We found a journey of about sixty miles had yet to be covered to bring us to our objective; but the fight we put up at Agagia greatly cleared the way for us, as it demoralized and almost knocked the heart out of the enemy.

The next place, as we learned from our airmen,

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

the enemy had taken up and strongly fortified was a long range of hills, some eighteen to twenty miles away. I shall never forget the march to them, nor the day after, as long as breath remains in my body. We set off at dawn, and marched and marched and marched, and the farther we went the farther the range of hills seemed to be away from us. And all this in a sun at about 130° in the shade, a full pack to carry, rifle, equipment, etc., over the scorching plains of the desert. Little wonder that we were beat before we reached the hills, and I thanked Heaven that on account of this piece of marching and the route we took to reach the hills we quite upset the plans of the Arabs, as they fell back to another position. Had they made a fight of it here, I am afraid we should have been too utterly fatigued to do justice to ourselves. We reached the hills, and had to climb them to get on to the main plateau, to be on even terms should the enemy attack. The hills were 600 feet high, and many men were so done up that they could not reach the summit.

Once on top, our desire was water. Every man was as dry as a wooden god. Men armed with picks, shovels, and entrenching tools, went out in search of this precious liquid; but strike the rocks as they would, they were found to be a great deal drier than we were, and yielded nothing. I thought to myself: "Oh, if I only had the power of Moses to strike the rock with magic wand, and cause a stream of water to spring forth!"

I would have had the blessings of all the brigade showered upon me. I myself, with tongue hanging out of my mouth (and a pint of Bass would not have been amiss then), went in search of the coolest spot I could find in order to get out of the scorching rays of the sun. I dis-

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covered a protuberance of rock which just left sufficient room under it to cover my head, and under this I crawled. It was joyfully refreshing. After I was there awhile, one of the men informed me that he believed snakes were in there. Snakes did not worry me at this critical period, so I remained until I heard the South African war-cry offered up as I have never heard it before. I ventured out to see what it was all about, and so beheld a pleasing sight. It was a party of the men pushing the loaded camels, with tanks of water upon their backs, up the mountain, the poor beasts being too utterly exhausted to climb them unaided. The water being so scarce, only one pint per man was issued, but this one pint was as good as an ocean: it saved our lives. The following day another pint was served out.

The plans being completed, we learned that we had to take and hold a pass. Failure would mean being totally cut off, so you can bet your life we meant to take it at all costs. Imagine our surprise, when we approached it, to find that the enemy had flown. Finding that we were on equal terms with them, being on the plateau and mainland, they thought discretion the better part of valour, and left. To our further pleasure, they had retired in the direction of Tripoli in disorder, and so we had an easy march into Solum. As matters stood, the reserve of two days' water supply was immediately issued, so the agony of it all came to an end. We quickly settled down, and the Duke of Westminster with his fleet of armoured motors went to the relief of ninety-one seamen off the torpedoed boat *Tara*, who had been prisoners in the hands of the Senussi for over four months. The *Tara* was torpedoed by an enemy submarine in the Gulf of Solum some seven miles from the shore; afterwards the crew,



## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

swimming ashore, had fallen into the hands of the enemy.

The capture of Solum brought into our possession again this coastguard station. The Duke of Westminster was assisted in his search by one of the Senussi, who gave us the information as to their whereabouts. It was a dash over the sand for about 110 miles. During the journey the cars ran into several small bands of the enemy, and annihilated them. It must have offered the Duke great sport. The *Tara* prisoners were released, but the English nurse taken with them at the same time had been lost sight of, and it was assumed that she suffered a terrible fate. I learnt from one of the *Tara* men that upon the approach of our armoured motors they relieved themselves of the only clothes they had, consisting of sacking, in order that the rescuing party might be able to distinguish between them and the Arabs on account of their semi-white bodies. I offered this man a cup of coffee, and upon asking him if he would like another, he replied that it was the best he had had for four months. He informed me that their Christmas dinner consisted of a few snails each, snails being considered a grand dish by the Senussi. He told me some pitiful and heartrending tales of how they were treated during their captivity. One of the party, in the course of digging a well which they were ordered to do, unfortunately broke his leg, and the witch-doctor with them tried to amputate his limb with a huge pair of scissors, but failed. He was compelled to work with the rest with his broken limb, in agony, until he collapsed. On their arrival and reception at Solum the poor victims wept for joy, and could hardly realize their good fortune. They all appeared half demented. They were removed

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to a hospital ship that came round from Alexandria to receive them, and I hope with careful attention and kind treatment they all survived. I saw the prison they were kept in while they were in Solum. It was a round stone structure so built as to form a big dome above. Not a particle of cement had been used in its construction; the loose stones were piled one upon the other. From the outside it looked like a huge heap of stones, and I found great difficulty in finding the entrance, which was a small manhole at the foot, and on a level with the ground. The interior had been dug some 6 or 8 feet inside.

In the absence of tents at Solum, we struck out for the city, a town made up of wooden shanties with absolutely no architectural pretensions or uniformity, and in the course of a few hours the lads had the town removed into our camp. The work of demolition was rapid indeed, and I had a villa to myself—indeed, so did most of the boys.

In building our small apartments, there was not enough wood to go round, so we had to leave an opening in front, which came in quite handy for ventilation purposes. The work brought us into endless trouble with our Adjutant, as very few of us possessed any knowledge of surveying; consequently, to look down the main street of our camp (Adderley Street), the huts reminded one of the path the ostrich would take in covering the ground. Zigzag Street would have been a more appropriate name. I visited the following day the spot where once was the town of Solum, and saw nothing but bare ground, with here and there some attempt at a solid foundation which once bore a so-called "building." Busy scenes could be observed daily with the arrival from Alexandria of all manner of craft, bringing all

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

sorts of materials of war to Solum, and a supply of provisions for the garrison. I rather fancy the Senussi had had enough, so we did not feel uneasy about surprise attacks being launched upon us. I looked upon the rest of two weeks I enjoyed here more in the nature of a fortnight at Muizenberg. We were camped on the beach; it reminded me greatly of Cape Town's fashionable pleasure-resort. Towards the end of March a huge steamer put in an appearance, and this afforded us a much more pleasant return to Alexandria than the march to Solum we one and all so manfully achieved.

The brigade was quartered eight miles outside Alexandria, and we then learnt with intense satisfaction that we had been greatly favoured, for within a week we would journey to France and have a go at the Kaiser. We arrived safely at Marseilles.

## OVERSEAS SPRINGBOKS' DEBUT— BATTLE OF HAZALIN

For the following account of the doings of the 2nd (Natal, O.F.S. and Cape Border) Battalion, whilst temporarily detached from the South African Brigade, I am indebted to Private Philip Cockcroft, without whose narrative, written hastily and at short notice, I should deem my book incomplete.—AUTHOR.

We of the 2nd S.A.I. were not destined to remain long in that "delicious" spot known as ——— Camp, for on January 19, 1916, after exactly a week there, we received hurried orders to pack and be ready for immediate departure. Rapid movement followed hasty commands, with the result



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that half the battalion found themselves twenty-four hours later encamped on the sandy beach at Mersa Matruh, the remainder arriving the next day. We were fated to be kept moving. On the 22nd orders were given to have greatcoats and ground-sheets rolled up in sections for conveyance by transport; for all spare kit to be packed in valises and left behind; and for every fit man to be in fighting order, provided with two days' rations, and ready to take the road at 2.30 p.m. Great was the enthusiasm of the men as they carried out these orders, and bitter the disappointment of those luckless unfortunates who were condemned to remain behind. Major-General Wallace's force began at two o'clock to stream out on to the sandy, dusty road that leads towards the heart of the Libyan Desert, and shortly after three o'clock the Springboks took the road, forming part of the long column which seemed to stretch for miles across the barren landscape. Almost the whole Empire had a hand in the moulding of that martial spectacle. English Territorials, a battery of Field Artillery (H.A.C.), Scottish Territorials, New Zealand Riflemen, Australian Horsemen, swarthy warriors of the Indian Army, South African Infantrymen—such was the composition of the small force that swung out on to the road from Mersa Matruh on that memorable Saturday afternoon.

The Springboks were not in trim for a long march, having not long since disembarked from a crowded transport after a tedious voyage, and the seventeen-mile tramp to Bir Shola proved to be a little too much for them. Scores fell out on the way, and straggled in as best they could; the main body halted, and bivouacked for the night, at 10.30. But there was to be little sleep; there was not a solitary crinkle to mar the piercing winter wind or

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

the torrents of rain except greatcoats and ground-sheets. Cold and wet we huddled together for warmth, our minds dwelling on the pleasant anticipation of a scrap on the morrow. At five o'clock on the following morning, Sunday, January 23, all were ready again to take the road, with the exception of a few whose feet were too bad to march; these were ordered, much against their will, to remain with the transport. An hour later we were off again, going well for a while; but by the time that breakfast halt was made all were feeling the effects of the unaccustomed exertions of the previous day. During the hasty meal of bully beef and biscuits, washed down by a few drops of the precious Adam's ale from Bir Shola well, the New Zealanders drew up level with us; and when at 9.30 the march was resumed, the two colonial battalions went forward side by side. The South Africans plodded along wearily; the New Zealanders, accustomed to long desert marches, were in excellent form.

Within five minutes of the resumption of the march, above the silence of the desert, broken only by the tramp of feet (for worn-out men never talk on the march), came, clear and distinct, the sound of a field gun far ahead. As if by magic, every Springbok leapt into a brisk step, his lethargy forgotten, and from every throat came the great war-cry: "Gobalaio Ghee! Gobalaio Ghee! Gobalaio Ghee! Wah!" The New Zealanders responded with their more musical but very weird "Haka!" and on we went at a pace that would have been impossible without that stimulating "bang" that rent the air at intervals.

The desert at this part was undulating, and there was a heavy mirage ahead, so that we were unable to see either the cavalry or the artillery,

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although they were at no great distance from us. The sound of the guns became louder and louder, and then came the rattle of musketry. How impatient we were! The one great fear from which we all suffered seemed to be that the artillery and cavalry would "finish them off" before we got a chance. On, on we went, laughing, singing, joking, until a halt was called just behind the guns. The New Zealanders had already halted, to come up behind and support. We were very impatient to be moving again; but when it was seen that additional ammunition was being given out, and that its distribution was being hurried on as fast as possible, our impatience wore off, and we were content to sit and watch the guns as they barked in quick succession. We were soon on our way again, but before reaching and passing the guns we were under fire. Ping! Zipp! Wheouw! came the stray bullets all around and amongst us, each being greeted with a string of jests: "Rotten shot! try again!" "Missed again!" "Hold hard, you careless devils! you will be hurting somebody." Thus did the lads of South Africa greet those who gave them their baptism of fire. Then came the inevitable first casualty, Lieutenant Perkins, of D Company, being hit in the face. Immediately afterwards the battalion split up into companies, then into platoons, and doubled out into extended order, with clockwork precision, taking up a position immediately behind the Sikhs. For the first time in history a South African force was in action overseas; this knowledge and the zest for battle kept away fatigue, and held our spirits at high-water mark.

Within a few minutes of our going into extended order, the disposition of our forces was as follows: Front line (centre), 15th Sikhs and two companies



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of South Africans; second line (centre), remainder of South Africans; flanks, mounted troops; supports for centre, 1st Battalion New Zealand Rifle Brigade; reserves, Royal Scots and Middlesex; artillery in the rear; the solitary air scout soaring overhead. In three long thin lines General Wallace's men went forward by short stages, whilst the bullets played their weird tune all round and above them. Owing to the mirage and undulating nature of the ground, the enemy was invisible to all but the men in the front line, who were returning bullet for bullet. The Senussis' shooting was erratic and inclined to be high, with the result that the rear lines were getting their share of the punishment, without being able to retaliate. Men fell fast, but we went forward as though on parade, except that we laughed, threw out jokes at each other, and pulled at our pipes and cigarettes. Thus the fight went on for hours, we always advancing, the enemy retreating, fighting a stubborn rearguard action. An exciting quarter of an hour followed the Senussis' attempt to turn our right flank; this attempt was promptly countered by the Australian Light Horse and a company of South Africans, but not before the enemy had succeeded in doing damage with his enfilade fire. Late in the fight the Turkish gunners got busy with an old 9-pounder, the shells from which burst anywhere—sometimes miles in the air, sometimes a few feet in the ground, sometimes after lying on the ground for awhile, and often not at all. Happily, their artillery was not manned in the same masterly fashion as were their Maxims, and the little "screamers" caused more fun than damage.

Eventually, after developing to a great intensity, their fire weakened suddenly, and then dropped into mere spasmodic sniping, as the enemy's retreat

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developed into flight. He was soon out of range, presenting only a long dim line of moving figures on the horizon. We lacked the forces necessary to turn the flight into a rout, so with a few parting shots from the artillery, which had dashed up nearer, the action was broken off, at about 3.30 in the afternoon, leaving the composite British force in possession of the field of Hazalin, smouldering with the burning ruins of the enemy's camp, and dotted with those of his dead that he was unable to remove.

For a short time we sat down talking it over, receiving news of our casualties; and then we turned our backs upon the foe, went into a long extended line, and swept the battlefields, searching for any dead or wounded that might have been missed. At dusk we halted for the night, formed a square, dug ourselves in, and tried to rest. Tried, but failed. Our transport, with the exception of a few very essential vehicles, had been unable to come up with us, owing to the muddy state of the road, and consequently we were without covering of any kind except the clothes we stood up in, with a long, rainy, bitterly cold night ahead of us, accompanied by sharp winds blowing across the shelterless plains. The desert bushes proved to be poor fuel indeed, and they were not over-plentiful; but around fires made of this grass-like substance, huddled together in groups, stood the shivering Springboks. Those who were on picket duty, and of course unable to light fires, fared even worse. The only way to retain any semblance of warmth in their bodies was to keep pacing up and down; but they were too exhausted to do this, and to lie down on the cold, wet ground was to court being frozen stiff. By conforming between these alternatives they managed to drag

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

through a seemingly interminable night of frigid misery. And yet, amidst all the wet and cold of that memorable night, the thing most desired was a cup of cold water. At last the dawn broke. The drizzle changed into a torrential rain, yet, though it wet us to the skin and accentuated the feeling of frostiness within our marrow-bones, it was welcome, for we were able to appease our raving thirst from the puddles on the ground. And then the sun broke through a rift in the heavy clouds, and we basked in its rays, whilst smiles broke out on every face.

Hastily we laid to rest the mortal remains of Captain Welch and the other good fellows who had paid the price of victory, then slowly began the backward march, through the quagmire of the waterless desert. Ambulance cars and ammunition waggons went axle-deep in mud every five yards, and had to be helped out by teams of men; the wounded had to be carried in stretchers by bearers almost dropping from sheer exhaustion; whilst the ammunition had to be off-loaded from the waggons and carried by men in light marching order.

For some hours, more resembling Napoleon's retreat from Moscow than a victorious British force, we struggled on through the mud. The muddy water lying in the ruts in the road was snatched up in cups and mess-tins, and quaffed with greater relish than was ever Rhenish wine by the most confirmed inebriate. The change to dry, sandy soil came almost suddenly; we were relieved of our extra burdens, which were once more placed on the waggons, and the pace became faster, but still slow. At 2 p.m. we reached Bir Shola. Here we drank and drank and drank again until our moisture-starved internals were satiated, and then



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we all grabbed our precious coats and ground-sheets (for we had come up with our transport again), formed a square, and "got down to it." We slept that night in spite of rain and cold; yes, slept, for our eyes would no longer remain open. Up betimes the next morning, the march was resumed. The long seventeen-mile tramp between Bir Shola and Mersa Matruh was accomplished in some fashion, through a blinding sandstorm, and at 3 p.m. on the 25th the 2nd S.A.I., limping or dragging one foot after another, dirty, unshaven, as brown as the desert, but still smiling, reached their camp, having in exactly seventy-two hours marched sixty miles, fought in a six hours' action, and undergone an experience which, in spite of the greater and more trying ordeals which lay before them in France, not one who survives this Armageddon is likely to forget. We spent the next six weeks at Mersa Matruh, training for desert marches, doing garrison duty, and at one time convoying a supply column a distance of forty-five miles and back. On March 3, after each of our other battalions had in turn arrived and got on its way into the desert, and our excellent friends the New Zealanders had left us to rejoin their brigade on the Canal, we set out on the heels of the rest of the Springboks, joining them on March 6 at Sidi Berrani, whence the first South African Infantry Brigade as a complete unit advanced on Solum.

### THE BATTLE OF AGAGIA

The South African Brigade with about 500 of the Dorset Yeomanry reached the battle-ground without any realization of the stubborn way in which the Senussi would hold on to it. The sing-

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

ing from one end of the line to the other showed that we were all in excellent spirits. The guns were drawn up to within about three miles of the line of battle. All was now ready, and officers could be seen on all elevations peering through their glasses for the first sight of the enemy. The ground was stony and baked, and the heat of the scorching sun intolerable; our packs seemed to anchor us. The ground held by the Senussi was a series of sand-dunes, and an excellent position to hold. The red sand was plainly discernible, but the nature of the ground being unsuited to the use of concussion shell fire, the artillery had to rely upon shrapnel. The mounted men cleared the field for us infantry. Thrilling with anticipation, men waited for their own first entrance upon the drama. They were already weary and footsore, for the forced marching began to tell, and the burden of the pack, the rifle, and the 150 rounds per man, was no light weight.

It was on a Saturday (Sunday we buried our dead, and many of our thoughts turned to the old home church and the mellow bells), and after ten o'clock, when the cavalry were observed to take a flanking movement, and then the guns were heard to roar into action. A cloud of smoke arose along the line of the dunes in front from the bursting shrapnel, but nothing could be seen of the Senussi. The defending guns were well concealed. Here and there from points of vantage the controllers of the batteries were able to indicate targets and register hits. The fire grew warmer, the noise was horrible. But now an ill-omened bird flew over their lines. Far aloft across the deep blue sky skimmed one of our aeroplanes; it curved, turned, and sailed over their trenches. It marked the shells bursting over their trenches, and the range

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was set right. The injuries were not yet numerous, but they were inexpressibly ghastly. Men who had hardly seen worse than a cut finger in their lives gazed with horror at the gross mutilation around them. "One dared not look sideways," said one of them. Stretcher-bearers, bent and wet with perspiration, received limp forms which were hoisted up by their comrades. Officers gave short, sharp words of encouragement or advice. The minutes seemed very long, but still the shower of bullets came swiftly along.

The plan of campaign was this: the third regiment to force the issue, the first regiment in support. On the command to advance, the two regiments went forward wave upon wave. The heroes of the third regiment shoved the fivefold clips down into their magazines, and crouched down on the stony ground, awaiting the signal for further advance. It was medieval, and yet impressive also in its immediate display of numbers; there was nothing of the swiftly weaving lines, the rushes of alternate companies, the twinkle and flicker, of a modern attack, but the steady onward movement of the regiments in extended order. The men, fingering their triggers, gazed expectantly at their officers, who measured the distance of the enemy. At this juncture the Dorset Yeomanry wheeled to the right and made a brilliant dash to outflank the Senussi. In the Anglo-Boer War I never experienced a nicer scene than this depicted. Whilst this movement was being brought about, the two infantry regiments went steadily forward and came into rifle range.

Suddenly a rolling wave of independent firing broke out from the third regiment. At some portions of the line the enemy were at 2,000 and in some portions 1,000 yards. Their defence was



## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

cleverly set out, and of course this can be accounted for by the presence of experienced Turkish leaders among them. They had expected the manner in which we should advance into their positions, and cunningly had posted machine guns on both flanks, which, as we advanced, played down our flanks; but luckily the firing was high, otherwise we should have been cut up to a man. The men, happy in having something definite to do, snuggled down earnestly to their work, and fired swiftly but deliberately into the black mass. Rifles, machine guns, and field pieces, were all roaring together, while the incessant crash of shells overhead added to the infernal uproar. Men lost all sense of time as they thrust clip after clip into their rifles. The Senussi, staggered by this onslaught, fought bravely. I had never before witnessed men fight more bravely under that leaden sheet. After an intense action the enemy thinned, and seemed to drift a little back, but only to take up a fresh position immediately to the rear. Peering in this direction, one could see the patches of black which showed the effect of our fire, which had rippled down their lines. The masses shredded and dissolved, and the Senussi hurried out of the position. The firing had made untenable their position, which they had held for close on eight hours against our attack.

Our machine guns played havoc with them. As they retired, the Dorset Yeomanry got in among them and slaughtered them. Whenever the chance occurs, the Arab is particularly clever and cunning, and knows how to meet a British cavalry attack. The Dorsets carried out a most desperate charge. On the approach of a horseman, the Senussi waits until the sword is thrust, and then sinks on his back, thus outwitting the cavalier, who flies

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past him, and before his horse can be pulled up the wily Arab has got upon his knees, and is taking aim at the horseman.

It is well to accentuate the fact that, though the most severe pressure was placed upon them by our rapid advance and accurate fire, the Senussi did not retire in any disorderly way. At one period of the battle the enemy made a clever move to cut us off by a flanking movement, but two companies of the first regiment quickly checked the movement.

## CHAPTER IV

### MY ENTRY INTO FRANCE, AND THE BATTLE OF DELVILLE WOOD

WHEN our ship picked up her pilot and entered the beautiful harbour of Marseilles, I felt a sense of anguish had taken possession of my soul. To stand on the deck and behold the gay and busy harbour, the domes of the city's beautiful structures, the wonderful colour aspect, and the magnificent beach washed by the blue waters of the Mediterranean, the steeple of Notre Dame, depicting the Virgin Mary, brought home to me the thought that the happenings in this "fair" of all countries ought not to be.

The first glimpse on coming ashore into this dazzling city does not by a long way give the impression of what is going on in the interior. The inhabitants appeared to me to be transacting their everyday affairs unmolested by the great world's drama being staged within such a small distance from their capital. It was very conspicuous in their reception of our brigade as we marched through the wide and well-kept streets of the town. At one period of our progress through the streets I could not distinguish which were the men or which were the comely French maidens, they appeared to be so mixed up. When passing down the ranks, I found that the men, all smiles, had come out of the ordeal with rosy cheeks, bouquets in their tunics, and flags adorning the muzzles of their rifles. Some had the necks show-



## My Entry into France

ing out of their tunics, all golden, portraying that the innermost contents was a blend of France's best. There was not a soul among us who did not relish the warmth of this great reception. But what a contrast to the other side of the picture! Widows' weeds met the gaze at almost every corner, and it was only too noticeable how many very young and pretty faces were among them.

It is in a large town like Marseilles that the frightful devastation that is hourly being brought about is noticed. We travelled for some three days to bring us up into the firing line, and I would like to dilate a little upon the glories of the South of France, or, rather, upon such glories as rapid transit by train would permit us to observe. From the outset I would recommend some of the South African farmers to visit the South of France. The view is most picturesque, and it is beyond my capacity to describe it. It is a difficult task to paint Nature's magnificent gifts to this part of the world, gifts which have been enhanced in value by the industry and experience of the French farmer. The vineyards planned so symmetrically; cattle as fat as butter; old-fashioned farmsteads; vast expanses of green that meet the eye on all sides; wide and beautiful rivers running their winding course, with banks enlivened by bountiful growths of poppies entwined with lovely yellow flowers—all these offered to one's vision a sight a fellow would always like with him.

On arrival after a tedious journey, under conditions that one would not call quite Continental *train de luxe* style of travelling, the Quartermaster on my train for the first time in his life found himself trying to appease the appetites of a hungry crowd, and hungry men are angry indeed on a train that has no scheduled time of going or

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

stopping. This reminds me of a question I put to the guard on departure. When I asked him what time we would leave Marseilles, he replied: "20.35." This is, of course, the Continental way of calculating time, but quite strange to the South African. The first thing I spotted on alighting from the train was a number of coils of smoke and a booming noise. It did not take me long to discover what it was. I screened my eyes through the bursting shrapnel, and could then see our plucky airmen going through it, from the anti-aircraft guns of Billie the butcher. This was quite a different reception from that of the town we had just left. We formed up in regiments, and new battalions are always met at the station by what I would term the "old stager," the man that has been through the hoop, and some very encouraging remarks were passed, such as, "This is the way to the cemetery." "Poor dears! to think that next week you will be on crutches!" A ready response on our part was, "Are we downhearted?" and the echo of a big "No!" meets the case. We had preliminary matters fixed up for us by the staff, and then to the command of "Quick march!" we moved off to our billets, a place we so much desired at this juncture as, after all, we were not considered men at this time, but sardines; we had been packed so closely together in our trucks, owing to the military necessity.

A haven of rest was the one outcry when we filed in one by one to the barns attached to the farm homesteads, and to find a plentiful supply of straw was most acceptable. But it did not last long. About 1 a.m. that morning a gas attack came along, and there we found ourselves to a man paraded in front of the farm, looking like spooks in our weird gas helmets. The humorous part of

## My Entry into France

it was when the sergeant-major yelled out: "Stop that smiling, all of you!" Luckily, the gas did not reach as far as our billet, so our good skipper allowed us to renew what most of us had been enjoying—namely, a well-earned sleep. But "Strafe the Bosch!" he did not fall into the line of our desire, and had us out again an hour later. If we could have laid hands on the man who opened that valve releasing the gas, there would have been a casualty in his lines. After a parade of an hour's duration we retired to our flea-pits again. Thanks to the Bosch, they permitted us to spend the remaining few hours to six o'clock comfortably in the hands of Morpheus. But at this hour our busy time set in—learning the use of the bomb, to consolidate positions when won; the correct way to handle the bayonet, to meet a well-trained enemy; and a host of other manœuvres too numerous to specify.

Here I will describe the billets, a cosy spot in a noisy land. Good food, a sound straw bed, bags of beer and champagne, if the pocket will allow—what more could the heart desire? So much for the inner man; now the outside view. Our sergeants' mess arranged under the gateway of the homestead, with table made of jam-boxes, and more boxes as chairs; a sound steak and two eggs as, perhaps, only known to the rural districts of France. Our covering to the mess, the canopy of heaven. Mr. Fritz attacking one of our airmen by means of a machine gun, the pieces falling about our table, and also fragments of bursting shrapnel. Watching the exciting scene over one's breakfast leaves very little more to be desired in the way of excitement. This is an everyday portion of our breakfast menu during the time we are in training and awaiting our turn to go into the trenches.



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Some mornings it was on a larger scale, as many as forty aeroplanes being engaged at a time. We suddenly got orders to move up into the trenches, and I must say my first experience of them was not alarming. I was too amused to know fear. There are four things the average man experiences on first going into the trenches, and they are as follows: First stage, over-cautiousness; second stage, cautiousness; third stage, "I don't care a damn" sort of feeling; fourth stage, the burial-party.

It was midnight in the trenches. The moon was at its full, and this is the time one has to cultivate the first stage to the utmost limit, as the moon is the very light the sniper waits for. Unconsciously I had got up on the firing steps, with my back turned to their trenches, conversing with my mates as if nothing was opposite at all. It is only when the familiar ping of the bullet almost tingles one's ears that the danger of exposure is brought home to one. I have always been possessed of the devil's luck, even in being exchanged before they put a stop to exchange. My first introduction to the whizz-bang was truly funny. I could not hear the noise, but exclaimed to my mates, "They must have been hurling snakes at us," when, seeing a curious object gliding through the grass along the parapet, I recognized what it was. They are very treacherous missiles. As the name implies, the whizz noise is when it has got you, and the bang when one finds parts of one's anatomy missing.

One day, as I was leaving the trench with a working party, I saw a dog running across no-man's-land. The following day I managed to intercept this animal, and found him carrying a bucket with German sausages inside. The dog had been carrying the same to his master, a sniper.

It would be futile for me to try and describe all

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the ups and downs that a brigade goes through in the course of their turn in the trenches. I attended the burial of my colour-sergeant, and just as the body was being lowered the Huns opened a machine-gun fire on us. Luckily, nothing came our way. The chaplain's words, "We are now burying our departed comrade," seemed to find an echo in our own hearts; for we were within range of death ourselves at the time, and the service seemed to be very long to us, no doubt owing to the close proximity of the Huns to us. I will now bring the reader to the time when we received orders to go to the Somme, and I saw more guns on my way there than taxis in Piccadilly. Before our bombardment, a feeling came across me that I would not like to be on the enemy's side of the trenches. We took up a position, awaiting the magic command to move forward. This occupied a few days, during which time sleep was out of the question. The bark and incessant roar of our guns hurling destruction and havoc upon the German positions was terrible. The sky was lit up by bursting shells and the flash of guns.

It was a sight the imagination could not very well picture. A German prisoner who surrendered and was brought in told me they had no food in the trenches during the whole of the bombardment, it being impossible for supplies to be brought up to them during this terrific artillery firing. He was very pleased to be over on our side. Their whole front at this section seemed to be ablaze, and how human beings could live here passes one's comprehension.

For sheer bluff the taking of Delville Wood is hard to beat. What the Germans were doing I do not know, nor what they thought of doing, either. Anyway, the minute we got there they seemed to

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

vanish, and a position the actual taking of which was expected to be both hard and costly was ours for the time being almost for the asking. But if we were inclined to pat ourselves on the back over the success of the surprise move, we were soon undeceived. Delville Wood taken was a very different thing to Delville Wood held. We might have suspected that such a success would have to be paid for, and pay for it we did during the next few days with the very life-blood of our battalions. The place had not even been evacuated by the enemy, as we thought it had been. Machine guns began to appear in the most unexpected places, and in addition the whole wood was a veritable hornets' nest of snipers. Now a machine gun would appear in a spot we had already passed, and the next minute another would commence to spit death and destruction just ahead. These guns had to be dealt with one by one, and the dealing with them meant stiff fights and quite a lot of deaths for the attackers. But it had to be done, and it was done, and through the woods we made steady progress. We soon had quite a goodly haul of prisoners, for I discovered that the one thing the German soldier will not face is the bayonet—that is, unless he is absolutely compelled to. So long as he can use his machine gun or throw his bombs, the average Hun will fight, and he is a good fighter up to that point. But at the actual second in which he is threatened with the bayonet, up go his arms, and he yells, "Kamerad! Kamerad!" As one of my pals remarked to me, if this had been a war purely with soldiers using the bayonet, we should have been marching through the streets of Berlin long ago.

In all, our particular battalions held on to the woods for a number of days, during which time



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the Germans turned the place into a perfect inferno. Only by giving you details of the number of men we lost in the holding could I convey an adequate idea of what it meant to hang on; and I am not going to do so, as to count the cost is a process which is liable to take the gilt off, and I am proud to belong to the gallant South African Brigade who fought and died during those days.

We were subjected to a heavy fire from the German "heavies" behind their lines; we held on in spite of this, while many a brave fellow went down, shot by one of their snipers still hidden in the trees on the far outskirts of the wood. But, rather than dwell on the losses, I would prefer to write about the wonderful feats of heroism performed by our men during the dark days in Delville Wood. One night provided a typical instance. A Lewis gun section which was sweeping the trees for snipers and observers who were up among the branches brought many Hun birds down from their nesting-places. But it was evident that one particular section of the wood held quite a party of the enemy, and their presence there was not doing the battalion the slightest bit of good. From our position it was impossible to get a gun trained on them, and it was imperative that they should be moved. So without any hesitation one of our gunners hauled his gun out of the trench we were in, and advanced with it right into the open, to get into a proper position for moving the troublesome enemy. There, practically without any cover, he was a fine target for the enemy sharp-shooters, and there were plenty of them ready to do their worst against him. But the gallant fellow seemed to lead a charmed life. He was hit in the left arm, his gun was hit at least once, but in the coolest manner possible he stayed on until he had fired

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

every round of ammunition he had taken with him, and we had no more trouble from that particular section of the wood. I should say that, roughly, he was out in the open for a full hour, risking death every second of the time, while we watched him with bated breath.

One night I was talking with two men of my platoon at the corner of the trench, when a shell came over and exploded not more than 4 yards from where we were. All it did was to turn the three of us upside down, and after a couple of minutes we were not a bit the worse for our experience.

During the whole of our steady progress the British artillery was subjecting their trenches opposite the wood to as heavy a fire as it was possible to imagine. In fact, I do not think anyone could imagine it who has not been there to see for himself. The enemy were not idle, either, as we found to our cost. Step by step, house by house, at Langueval, which separates the two portions of the wood, was the only way we could move. I saw a number of instances of our men entering houses armed only with rifles and bayonets, houses which held Germans in plenty. What grim scenes were enacted in those one-time peaceful abodes of French family life! I saw one party of about half a dozen brave boys rush headlong into a house with a yell, though there were Germans at every window. We had forced ourselves well into the woods, and I was standing in the dividing roadway. My position was just near the doorway of a house which I thought had been cleared of the enemy. Suddenly a voice near at hand yelled, "Look out, Doitsh!" Instinctively I turned in the direction of the house, and framed in the doorway I saw a German officer with his revolver aimed

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point-blank at my head, just in the act of firing. Even as I was turning the shot rang out, but the bullet fortunately whizzed past my head. At the same instant one of my comrades fired at him, the shot taking effect. Looking back on it now, I know full well that if my friend had not given me the timely warning the bullet would have passed through my head as certain as anything. At that range the enemy officer could not possibly have missed me, but turning as I did on hearing the shout he missed me.

We found it difficult to adapt ourselves to trench fighting, as this was not the South African method of warfare. Give our men the open, where we can face the enemy and fight, and we are at home; but trench fighting was, as it were, a new toy to us. But at the same time we made the best of it. We kept strafing the Hun, and of course got back as much as we gave. It is, however, curious how the Huns knew when they were put up against new troops, and also it was strange to know that they knew that we were the South Africans, as they posted a notice up saying that they would skin and burn alive the first South African they captured.



## CHAPTER V

### BILLETS

ONE of my billets consisted of a barn which was divided into three parts. The centre part was filled with straw, and naturally was nice and cosy, especially for the hens that roamed about the yard. I watched one of these hens quietly steal into the barn and creep up between the straw. It remained there for some considerable time. Meanwhile I laid low and watched events. Being a scout, it aroused my eagerness almost to a panic as time began to pass and no hen reappeared. At last my patience was rewarded, for out pranced the hen, proud of having accomplished her task as set by Nature. As soon as she had departed I started creeping between the straw. It was very narrow and dark, but I was fortunate in having a torch with me, and soon spotted my prize. I found something like fifty eggs under the straw. This faithful hen served me every day until I was warned to parade for the trenches, and then I had to give up my treasure. I do not know if the next regiment that came in found out my secret, or whether the farmer discovered where his hen had been laying her eggs.

Another place I was billeted in was a dye factory in pre-war days. My bed was in one of the tanks. On our arrival at this billet, one of my men drank some of the dye in mistake for stout, and a visit to the hospital was the outcome. Some billets we occupied were in cellars, and these were the best

## Billets

ones to be in, being well out of the way of big shells.

My dream of a billet was a nice cosy room, a fair French maiden conveniently at the door before reveille inquiring what time I would like my hot water, a valet to clean my boots. But the realization!

Well, I would call some of the places rat-pits, and I have come across some rats as big as rabbits. I saw one day a very large specimen playing with a cat in quite a friendly manner. They must have met before, for they seemed quite pals. I wish I could have caught the one that removed the only bag of Springbok tobacco that I possessed. Some of them had a very uncanny way of walking about in the vicinity of my chin in the night, and I have been many a night awakened and startled by these monsters. I had one good visitor, a hen, who used to come into the barn at the sound of reveille cackling away to the beat of the band, eventually depositing a nice large egg in my corner. Using my valise, I fixed up a nest for her, as an inducement for her to bring her friends. This she eventually did. This billet was up in the loft, and had to be negotiated by a very uncertain ladderway; and coming home after lights were out, and having had a good evening's entertainment, it proved a wonderful feat to mount the ladder, especially when intermediate steps were missing. Performing our ablutions in this place was decidedly awkward.

Another billet I was in was on the ground-floor. I was awakened suddenly from a pleasant dream to find that a cow was licking my face. A little time after a sow with numerous family came my way. I found out after that the stable had been the home of the cow for ten years.

## CHAPTER VI

### EXPERIENCES LEADING UP TO MY CAPTURE IN DELVILLE WOOD

THE manner in which our boys conducted themselves leads me to think that man, after all, is the most courageous animal God ever made.

I will deal with the experiences our brigade went through from the time we were ordered to take Delville Wood. It was on July 14 that, in company with a platoon, we set out with ammunition for a regiment. As we advanced with the weighty boxes, the high explosive shells of the enemy were flying round us in frightful fury. The delivery of the ammunition being a matter of great urgency, we could not take any cover from the inferno.

The regiment were crying out for ammunition, their machine guns could not hold out, and the situation was desperate. We had to face the music (and the German Jack Johnsons take some facing too!). We had only advanced a few hundred yards, when our platoon officer went up into the air by the explosion of a shell, but, luckily for him, it was only a case of shell-shock. I had to "carry on" with the men. A few paces farther on they seemed to drop round me in all directions. This was a disastrous state of affairs. I called a halt and tried to discover the cause. Screening my eyes, I looked all over the wood, which was thickly studded with trees, and after a moment



## My Capture in Delville Wood

noticed a movement in one of them. Ordering two men to accompany me, I went towards the wood. Upon reaching the tree and discerning a boot, I exclaimed: "I have discovered the source of the trouble; come down, my beautiful Bosch!" At the same time I grabbed the boot and hauled for all I was worth. Realizing that the game was up, he came down crying for mercy, saying, "Comrade, mercy, comrade!" in the best English he could muster. He was a sight to behold, covered in branches, and when he was up in the tree it was difficult to see between them. Even his face was painted green. He had a fine machine gun up the tree, and must have slaughtered our men in the wood that day had I not brought his little game to an end. The men were furious with him, but he was put with the other prisoners. We carried on, and eventually delivered the ammunition.

The firing in the wood came from all directions, as Delville was the most advanced portion of the line, and therefore a salient. Men were being blown in all directions. Those who survived it all will remember it for life.

The arrival of my party, minus casualties, which I unfortunately had to leave behind, was heralded by cheers, for now the regiment was able to carry on.

The next problem that confronted us was how we were to go back. However, this we managed with no casualties; but it was something wonderful to achieve, because on the way we had to pass through the village of Langueval, where the houses were toppling in all directions, first one of us being hit by falling débris, and then another. It was courting death to try and take cover behind them. We were confronted by two evils—a house toppling on us or a shell hitting us; so we

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

chose the latter, thinking there was less risk. The dead lay about in large numbers, a sight I never wish to witness again. I have not tried to depict to my readers what a heavy artillery attack prepared by a designing foe was like; the picture would be too terrible! Let it suffice to say that to live for four days in a wood which was heavily bombarded was such that it was a miracle any escaped to tell the tale. It was here that I lost my leg by coming in contact with a 240-pound shell.

Upon arrival in our three-foot trench, we had to pack and move up into the wood that night, retracing most of the ground we had covered that afternoon.

On account of some of the Germans having made an entrance into the wood at different places, it turned into a game of hide-and-seek, and in a cold, cheerless pitch dark wood and a drizzling rain it was not a pleasant pastime. If any of my readers has had a like experience he will fully appreciate the awful time. We tramped and tramped through the mud known to Flanders, through and over broken trees, and into ruts filled with water, staggering under our load of barbed wire, stakes, pegs, picks and shovels, useful articles with which to consolidate our position when won. This, together with a bag of bombs and rifle hanging across one, you will agree, is like turning a man into a mule. But the job had to be done, and a man had to make superhuman efforts to win through.

Just as the experiences of individuals differ, one man losing his life in some perilous enterprise, while another passes through the same unscathed, so may one unit emerge triumphant



IN THE CAMP AT OHRDRUF.

A snow fight between British, French, and Russian prisoners of war.

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## My Capture in Delville Wood

from the conflict with but slight loss, while another loses four-fifths of its strength in action, and yet falls short of successful achievement.

Once we reached the position, we had to hold it at all costs, which was under most trying circumstances, as all the way shrapnel shells seemed to reach as far as our faces, and burst. I suppose it was on account of the pitch darkness that fragments of shell did not reach us, as the enemy had not the range.

However, it was more than miraculous that not a soul was hit in my party. We began to dig ourselves in, and we were proud of the fact that we were able to beat the fastest Australian rabbit at his own game. Unfortunately, the approach of dawn, which sets in at a very early hour in France in the summer, prevented more than a three-foot trench being accomplished. The lads who possessed 6 feet of splendid manhood had just to double themselves up in two to take advantage of the cover offered. Two fearful nights were spent in these trenches, as the Germans made an attempt to break in on us in the rear.

The South African war-cry in these woods on these two nights was most inspiring. We were itching to get at the enemy and to go to the assistance of our boys. But what were we to do? The trench I was in had to be held, but it was with great difficulty that I held the boys back.

However, the lads were equal to the occasion when it came, and they got at the enemy with cold steel.

Our turn came on the second night. . . . Well, our turn was short and merry. The enemy

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

made the next attempt from my front. I waited for the right moment, then with bombs and bayonet illustrated to the Bosch the stuff South Africa is made of. In the general mêlée I suddenly bumped against a Bosch weighing about 20 stone. I parried his bayonet, missed the mark with my own, and found myself sitting on his face, knocking spots off him and doing my best to alter his good looks. But it was an unsavoury job, with his teeth firmly gripped in my thigh. The bayonet must have gone through his skin, judging by the blood about him. We had both fallen into a shell-hole; he had fallen on the top of our rifles, and I could not release my bayonet from under him. He had gripped my leg and the pain was agonizing, but at the same time I was losing no time in inflicting all the damage I could upon him. A timely bullet from one of our officers who had come up, being attracted by the yelling that was coming from Fritz and myself, put an end to his earthly career.

I pulled myself together again, and was in the scrap when we had to tackle a retreating foe. Bombs served the occasion well. After a hot encounter on both sides I returned to my trench. Sleep for any of us (and I found myself with only eight men) was impossible. We had to be on the alert all night, as one of the regiments of our division was ordered to clear the wood of the enemy who had broken through at our weak points, and the firing from them was hard to distinguish from that of the enemy. We had continually to alter our front, one moment facing the front, and the next the rear, and this meant a very keen lookout. When it is a matter of life and death, I fancy sleep is far from one's thoughts, as the intense excitement counteracts it. But at the



## My Capture in Delville Wood

same time one cannot do without this necessary asset, and I found myself falling off to sleep standing up, a thing I had never done before.

In the daylight a sniper had been trying to hit me, and I had had to keep a keen lookout. I wish I could have located him, as I had with me a young traveller who was not known to miss a flying springbok at 800 yards, and Fritz could not have been half that distance away. The nearest he got to me was to put a bullet in my emergency ration bag, immediately behind my head, at the back of the trench. I opened it, and found the bullet had gone into the tin of bully beef, which I afterwards ate, but could not find the bullet, so perchance I may have eaten that as well. But better this than having it through my head.

The Bosch trenches faced us at this point, about 300 yards away. Everything seemed as silent as the grave over there, but to show one's head above the 3 feet of trench meant death, as the enemy lurked in every conceivable spot in the grass in front of their trenches. At intervals we could discern them endeavouring to dart to another part of the position over the open country, and this afforded great sport, as there was a definite object to aim at. They showed wonderful courage in this adventure, which required nerves of iron. We could fathom their scheme, which was to strengthen their flanks, where they were mustering in great numbers to launch their attack, which they did the next day. It can be understood why we were without anything warm to drink while we were in the extreme front of the wood. To make a fire of any description or to show smoke of any kind would be to give the exact position away. It was the most dangerous job imaginable for the ration-party to keep up the supplies, and it was only

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

accomplished with loss of life on each occasion rations were served out. Bully and mud make a nice mixture; this was our daily menu. Every one of the stretcher-bearers was worthy of recognition, as it was heroic work to carry the wounded to the dressing-station, for the nearest one was about a mile and a half through the wood. This was accomplished at a time when the high explosive shells were raising fountains of mud, slush, and earth, and the terrific roar of the explosions was deafening.

The number of dead I saw in the wood will bear testimony to the work South Africa succeeded in doing in the Great War. I will not trespass upon the patience of my readers with full details of what the regiment went through, as Delville Wood has already been much written about, but will continue. And this brings me to the time I was wounded. About 5 a.m. on the morning of July 18, 1916, the Germans had begun their artillery preparation for the great counter-attack. Of huge trees in front of me, standing at 3 a.m. that morning, nothing but the stumps remained.

The onslaught was hell let loose. Every mother's son of us was worked up to a fever pitch awaiting the attack. We knew and fully expected what was coming, but did not anticipate that the attack would begin as early as it did.

I was cleaning the mud from my rifle, and was in the act of polishing my bayonet, when a Jack Johnson bursting by the side of the parapet caught me in the foot, all but severing this member from my body. The boot was blown clean off. The situation was so bad that my comrades dare not venture to my aid. I shouted for a stretcher-bearer, but the only one left there had just been hit. I implored one of the men to get me some

## My Capture in Delville Wood

bandages, but search as he would the medical haversack could not be found. It was in another trench. All I had was the small field dressing carried by every soldier.

I was badly bleeding, and the small dressing had no effect in stopping it. I removed the puttee from the other leg, and managed to tie the battered foot, which was only hanging on by the skin, to my leg to keep it on. Two of my comrades took me a few yards to one of the dugouts that were constructed by the Germans before we took the wood from them, and there found Lieutenant —— of my regiment, Sergeant ——, and six others that had all been wounded at about the same time. One man suffering from shell-shock fell down the dugout on top of us. Poor fellow! he was bad. These high explosive shells are more than a human being can stand.

We tried to make ourselves comfortable, but the din and roar about us made us all feel far from pleased with our lot. The bursting shells hit the top of our dugout, and I had my doubts about it holding out. But for huge piles of earth being blown in upon us, the dugout mastered the tempest without. The C.O. of my company came to us, and said he would go and try to get stretchers for us all, but while engaged on this errand a shell killed him. We waited for hours, when one of the men came into the dugout and imparted the cheery information to us that the enemy were in the wood. Upon hearing this, Lieutenant —— said: "I am not going to be made a prisoner." We all echoed his sentiments, and were not going to fall out on the point, either. So they struggled the best way they could. I found myself unable to escape, and Lieutenant —— said to me: "Make the best of a bad job if you cannot get away."



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The prospects of falling a prisoner were not at all pleasant. There was I alone in the wood, for when I put my head out, with tremendous effort, I found that the boys had had orders to fall back and strengthen another company in the interior of the wood. I resolved to myself that I would not fall a prisoner. By hook or crook I was going to try and find my own lines. I got out of the dugout with difficulty, and, picking up two rifles, I tried to use them as crutches. I could not make any progress at all with them. The deep mud beat me. The muzzles sunk down deeply into it, and I fell over. The rifle fire and the machine guns playing on the wood were terrific at this time. I lay on my back absolutely exposed to the murderous fire, and it is a wonder I am here to record my experiences.

The bullets whizzed by me, and the experience was like being out in a real South African hailstorm. The rattle of the missiles was likened to that of hail falling on a galvanized roof.

Discretion being the better part of valour, I deemed it advisable to adjourn to the dugout again, which I did. I was once more left to my thoughts, and the fear of becoming a prisoner with the Huns again took possession of me. Again I resolved that this should not be.

I emerged once again, and made another attempt with the rifles. I struggled desperately with them, and was going along grandly, when I encountered the fallen trees, which offered a substantial obstruction to my further progress, and I fell all in a heap among them. I extricated myself, and struggled once again back to the only fairly safe place I knew of, the dugout. I looked at my watch, and it showed that it was eight o'clock. I reflected whether to lie there and bleed or starve to

## My Capture in Delville Wood

death, or to try and make a superhuman effort to get back.

When the thought of my wife and children flashed through my brain, I was up in an instant, and, carrying my injured limb in the air, I snatched up a bag containing emergency rations, knowing this would keep me from starvation for at least twenty-four hours. I commenced to move off, when I became faint, and had once more to return to the dugout. I lay there about five minutes, when I heard a fearful screaming coming in the direction of the dugout. Ten Germans or thereabouts peered into the dugout, and on seeing me screamed: "Arous, arous, arous! Loos, loos!" One was in the act of throwing a bomb on the top of me, and I thanked heaven he altered his mind. Seeing by their gestures that they wanted me to come out, I did so. They inquired if there were any more of my comrades in there, and I replied in the negative. They thereupon unmercifully kicked me and struck me with the butts of their rifles, and then told me to get up. The language I used to them was the choicest Billingsgate, I can assure you, and if they had understood it it would have been the worse for me. Their maltreatment did not affect me much, as my wound was troubling me, and I was in great pain. They then moved on farther, clearing the wood, and I felt happier, and at last succeeded in getting along past the fallen trees, but my cardigan caught in the branches. Every moment seemed a year to me, but it was a matter of life and death, and, no matter how near we are to the latter, we hang on to every chance that comes our way.

No sooner had I got over one lot of shattered trees than I came across another lot; the wood was literally strewn with refuse of every description.

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I had but a faint recollection of the true path I had to take to bring me to my own lines. I calculated that I would have to travel a distance of about two miles. My first objective was the road dividing the wood, which was in two portions. I made for this, and on the way came across the bodies of dead Germans in their hundreds, and here and there the bodies of our own brave boys, a gruesome sight. One in his kit was lying in a peaceful attitude, with one hand resting on his head, and the expression on his blood-stained face seemed to say : "Those who may happen to see me, tell my comrades, tell South Africa, I died willingly for her honour."

I had not got very far, when I ran into about fifty of the enemy, and if looks would kill a person I should have died on the spot. They surrounded me, screaming like madmen. They then held a war council, as it were, over me. By their attitude, it seemed as if they wanted to end my earthly career at once. The leader of the mob, whom I took to be a sergeant-major, who spoke English fairly well, said to me : "We intend to kill you." I answered : "If you wish to be so cowardly, you can do so." He replied : "We Prussians are not cowards." He then turned to the remainder, and, after a good deal of talking among themselves, said : "Your people kill our wounded." I there and then denied this.

After a time he again turned to me, and said : "We think you are wounded enough ; we have decided to let you go : clear out." They went on again, as if bereft of their senses, some waving bombs, others brandishing their rifles, some flashing their bayonets, screaming : "Arous, arous, arous !" I said : "All right ! keep your hair on." I then continued my way along the path, and still



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ran into batches who looked daggers at me. I fancy the sight of their dead comrades lying about made them more vicious towards me.

Sometimes I lay perfectly still until they had passed me. In the distance, as I was coming nearer the road I was making for, I saw about 1,000 of them coming to the second portion of the wood which the road divided, so I pushed forward and made for Langueval, where I knew our first dressing-station was. But I could see it was useless going in that direction, as I should be asking for the very thing I was attempting to avoid. I reached the road, and darkness by this time was setting in. I looked into a trench that the regiment had been holding previous to their strategical retirement. Feeling parched (and a man when wounded gets thirsty very easily), I searched for water, and found a petrol tin lying on the parapet, which, to my intense surprise and pleasure, I found to contain a good quantity of water. I struggled down into the trench to ease my thirst and to collect my thoughts, in order to plan my next move.

In part of the trench a machine gun stood, left by the regiment in their rapid retirement. I call it a retirement, but it was really not so; it was a clever move, as I afterwards learned. The word "retire" was not in our vocabulary, as orders, prior to my being hit, were sent along the trench that there must be no such thing. A Captain was sitting in the trench on an ammunition box, stone dead. What wound caused his death I could not discern, as there was no blood about. He was sitting quite upright, and looked as if he had been gassed. I sat near his body and was left alone with my thoughts. Pause for a moment, reader, and fancy yourself in my place, and then you will

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be able to imagine to yourself how I felt. My almost severed foot was giving me terrible pain, the prospects of falling into the hands of the enemy were ever before me, it was bitterly cold, and the rain had not stopped for some days. I could not be recognized for mud, and my uniform was in rags. The man who had tried to assist me in bandaging my foot had to cut my pants all up the seam to get at the femoral artery, a point I put him up to, as, thanks to previous training, I knew what to do, but had not the things to do it with. I had made an improvised tourniquet out of a twig and my handkerchief, but this was not powerful enough. I had to resort to digital compression, and my readers who have had experience in first-aid will be able to understand what I went through to stop the bleeding for thirty hours. Naturally, I could not do it effectively, and therefore the quantity of blood I lost was positively alarming, and it made me fearfully faint. I lay down to work out my plan of escape. I finally decided that I would move off as soon as it got dark, for it takes some time in France in the summer weather, as, before it is fully dark, there is the period of semi-darkness known as "twilight," which is not experienced in South Africa. I finally decided that I would take a devious course, and circle the wood, considering the distance would be about five miles. It was more than my life was worth to go out into no-man's-land in the twilight. I discovered a waterproof sheet in the trench, and with that covered myself up, and awaited the time to move off. From utter fatigue and weakness I fell asleep.

## CHAPTER VII

### GERMANY: HOW I WAS TAKEN PRISONER, AND THE GERMAN CAMP AT OHRDRUF

IT must have been about three o'clock on the morning of July 19 when I awoke suddenly. I had dreamt that peace had been declared, and I was in Berlin listening to an oration of the Kaiser, in which he declared he was very glad to welcome the British prisoners there, who would soon be in London again. I had a rude awakening.

I was met with the spectacle of a number of Germans entering the trench in which I was lying, with picks and shovels; and seeing the dead officer, they began to examine the corpse and remove it to the parapet. They then began to dig, and were evidently going to take up their position in the trench.

I felt a bit uneasy. I had my head covered up under the sheet, but they must have noticed me, as they began talking to themselves in German, and advanced towards me. I thought it was time to show myself, and I do not know who received the greater fright, they or myself. They evidently expected to find a corpse under the sheet, and when I exposed myself they seemed to get a shock.

As a matter of fact, a few of them jumped over



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the top as if they had had a start. They pulled me out, and I saw a few hundred of them, who seemed to have just arrived, as they were starting to take off their packs. They appeared to be a fresh lot, as their uniforms were spotless, and they had evidently not occupied trenches.

A big bully, whom I took to be a sergeant-major, came towards me, and said in broken English: "Here is a swine Englisher." He ordered one of his men to fetch an officer. A very important-looking man came along, whom I took to be a General.

He said he would get two men, when it got lighter, to take me over to their lines and get me fixed up. I told him I would be glad if he would let two of his men help me to get near my own lines, and I would then crawl along on my back the rest of the way. He replied: "Oh no, you are my prisoner." Our artillery at this time was firing heavily, and their stretcher-men were very busy.

It was quite a scene to watch the Huns trying to dodge the shells. I forgot about all danger to myself; I suppose I was getting used to it. Their continual cry for the "Sanitats," which is the German for stretcher-bearers, kept these individuals quite busy.

They placed me behind a tree, with a big burly German to guard me. He kept on moving his arm, which made me a bit suspicious; but looks are deceptive, however, for after a while he offered me the only piece of bread he had in his haversack. I remained with him until it was properly light, when some of our boys were brought towards me under a German escort. I asked the guard over me if he were a Saxon, as he seemed too good to be a Prussian. He replied: "We are Prussians." Up to now they had not put their trench

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threat into practice—namely, to skin and burn alive the first South African they caught. We took it that they meant this as a way of revenge for South-West Africa. I wonder whether history will do the South Africans justice. Will it tell how, when ordered to take and hold the wood at all costs, they took it, and then made one of the most heroic defences in the history of the war?

Being the first South African to have the great misfortune to fall into the hands of the Germans, my readers will readily understand when I admit the fact that I wished the muddy ground where I lay would at that moment open and swallow me and my harried and tormenting capturers. With the thought of these fiends putting into execution their threat, of skinning and burning alive the first South African that fell into their hands, running through my burning brain, my foot hanging to my leg by a thread of skin which I tied into the remaining portion of the limb with the aid of a puttee, the rain pouring down heavily, my lot was not a happy one.

The want of food and water did not add enjoyment to my position, and the thoughts of home and family made me one of the most depressed of beings.

In this condition of despair, I saw coming towards me about seven other South Africans whom the Germans had captured farther back in the woods, escorted by three Germans. I felt somewhat relieved when they reached the spot where I lay.

By the expressions they wore it would be hard to decide which of us looked the happiest. An officer came upon the scene, and ordered our removal to their lines. The wretched journey there now set in. Although we were prisoners in

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the hands of an inhuman foe, I will say that not one of us lost the spirit inborn in every Britisher, of courage and fortitude, and I credit this spirit with my ultimate recovery from all the sufferings I endured from the time of being taken a prisoner into the enemy country until my happy release.

The journey across no-man's-land to their lines will for ever leave a mark upon my memory. I, unfortunately, was rendered incapable of helping myself across, owing to the horrid condition I was in, so the German officer ordered two of the unwounded prisoners to carry me over. This they did in a pickaback fashion. Of course, being no feather-weight, these good men found it extremely difficult. The rough state of the roads, the innumerable trenches to be negotiated over their system of defence, rendered stops inevitable; but the escort would not permit this. No sooner had they placed me on the ground than they were bullied to take me up again, and could hardly manage a few minutes for a slight rest.

Into and over their trenches the small party journeyed. Barbed wire entanglements were negotiated, and all manner of obstacles, which rendered our progress very difficult. All the time our artillery were playing upon their defences, and shells were bursting about us. I often wonder to myself how we managed to cross the open country without being hit. In passing over their trenches, which were packed in thick formation with Germans, we were greeted with jeers, and if looks could kill we should have immediately been rendered dead men. The journey was one of about three miles, and when we eventually accomplished it the carrying-party were done up, and also smothered with blood from the continuous bleeding from my wound. I myself was all but in



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a state of collapse as we entered the village held by them, but a German officer would persist in compelling us to face his camera. I was then taken into a small house, which I found to be their dressing-station. There were a large number of German wounded, who commenced mocking and jeering me. The German doctor after a space of about an hour dressed my wound. The unwounded remainder, with the exception of a sergeant-major who was wounded in the hand, and therefore a walking case, were separated from us. From the dressing-station I was carried by two German orderlies to another dressing and collecting station some distance farther down their lines. This place was a French cathedral used for the purpose. Here I found a number running into hundreds, mostly German wounded, who were all on stretchers. I and other Britishers were placed upon the stone floor of the edifice apart. A Prussian officer came in my direction and got into conversation. He said: "We Germans are treating you all right, aren't we?" I replied: "In here not so badly." He continued: "Not like you people; you Britishers kill our wounded." I said to him: "You as an officer, do you believe this?" He replied: "I myself do not believe it. I have lived in London, have done business with English people, and have had always the profoundest respect for them; but it is what my men tell me." I informed him that was incorrect, as all the German wounded I had seen coming into our lines were better treated than our own men.

The groaning and moaning noise heard (and the German makes a poor patient) rendered my condition and frame of mind decidedly gloomy. The aisle portion of the cathedral was put into use as the dressing-station and operating portion. It

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was here that I experienced the frightful spectacle of a Prussian doctor using the saw and knife upon British and Russian prisoners without the aid of anæsthetics. Hearing the screaming sounds and yells from these unhappy victims, I was beginning to bemoan my fate, as I was fully conscious of the fact that at least my foot would have to be amputated, and perhaps further operations performed upon me.

The symbols of peace and sacrifice hanging upon the walls of this sacred edifice had been undisturbed by shell or carnage of war, and they seemed almost lifelike as they looked down upon the dismal scene. Even the crucifix adorning the effigy of the Lord immediately above the spot where the Prussian doctor was performing his work of torture appeared to view the aspect of it all with infinite abhorrence and disgust. But the aspect of such thoughts did not temper the unmerciful mind and passion of the Prussian officer. Fortunately for me, I was spared the torture of being attended to here, as it was intended that we should all leave as soon as possible for Germany. It must have been about ten o'clock in the morning of July 19 when I was brought into the cathedral. About eight o'clock that evening, being driven almost mad with pain, I requested to be allowed to see the doctor. My wound would not stop bleeding. I was taken up to the dressing section and placed upon the operating-table. The doctor informed me through an interpreter that I was being removed an hour later, and he could not, therefore, attend to me, but he would redress the wound. After probing and putting me through some awful pain, he redressed it, and I was taken back to the spot whereon I had rested all day. At about nine o'clock that evening, I together with some others

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was taken away in a horsed waggon, a distance of about twelve miles, and upon arrival was laid upon the open ground, under the canopy of a starlight night, in which all seemed to be very peaceful. We were served out with two cotton blankets each, and informed that we should spend the night here. Feeling distressed and done up entirely, I fell into what I will describe as the most beautiful and refreshing sleep I have ever experienced throughout my life, a sleep particularly strange considering my disturbed condition of mind.

I awoke at the kick of a German sentry who had been placed with others on guard over us. I should say it was about 5 a.m., and, feeling refreshed by the blessing of a sound sleep, I was served out with a mug of black sugarless coffee, and ordered to be ready for a further journey. It was here that I recognized familiar faces, other prisoners of war from my own company, and this brought a little comfort to me. Despite our sad predicament, we all joined in a hearty laugh at the position in which we found ourselves. A little later a huge batch of German wounded, walking cases, to the number of about 500, came upon the scene, all waiting to be attended to. They appeared to be horrified at seeing by our faces that we were placing a pleasant construction upon our fate.

A little later we were all taken to the station, some little distance away, and entrained for a place named Le Cateau, a French town in their possession. We were hurried along to the hospital, and the only expressions of sympathy that seemed to help our otherwise sad life were those upon the faces of the unfortunate French women locked up in Le Cateau, and forced to live in the town under the ban of the Hun. The expressions in their eyes



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seemed to convey to us the meaning that their very hearts bled for us in our cruel position. But they were rendered powerless to help us in any shape or form. On arrival at the building that was put into use as a hospital, I was stripped of my tattered uniform and other clothing, and put into a wooden box which answered the purpose of a bed.

After an hour's delay, a great big bullying man, whom I found to be the German doctor in charge, came to me, and, after scrutinizing my wounded leg, shook his head, and said in broken English: "The Germans have shot you well; your leg is finished." This was a very encouraging remark to make to me, and I felt like battering his face in. I did not expect sympathy from them, but I did expect a certain amount of consideration due to a human being. I myself would help and assist a wounded dog more sympathetically.

He ordered my removal to another hospital, for cases needing operations; this place was more for slightly wounded cases. I was then placed upon a stretcher by German orderlies and removed to this other hospital. I had not been settled above half an hour, when I saw another prisoner patient placed in the bed immediately opposite me, and, to my great astonishment, found him to be one of my company's Lieutenants. We were surprised at meeting each other in this new and most uncomfortable sphere. This officer shared the same dug-out with me, and, on hearing that the enemy had succeeded in breaking into the woods, had struggled out of the dugout, and, as I thought at the time, successfully evaded the Germans. I can picture to myself what his feelings must have been in the matter; what would he not have sacrificed to have accomplished his intentions! But like a hero

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he bore his wounds, and assisted me greatly in bearing mine.

It was about eight o'clock that evening when I was admitted, and at midnight I was taken out of bed to see the German doctor in the operating-room. I was placed upon the operating-table, and the first thing I asked the doctor, who understood English very well, was: "You will give me chloroform, won't you?" He replied: "I have no such thing in the place." I said: "You are not going to hack me about without its use, are you? I am willing to pay for it." I calculated upon 28 francs I possessed when I fell prisoner, being ignorant at the time that this sum of money had been stolen from me by one of the orderlies who had relieved me of my clothing at the other temporary hospital. To my great relief, he informed me that he did not intend amputating, but only to examine my wound; and thereupon, with an assistant, he began to describe in German the name of the injury, the assistant writing down particulars of it in a book. I was then put back again into bed. For the remainder of the night my sleep was disturbed by a most unpleasant dream, wherein I pictured myself in this bed a few yards distant from the trench I had been holding in the woods, the bursting shells about me, and could not fathom why I had a bed all to myself in this of all places. When I awoke, the realization of it all! In my dream I experienced visions of home, of comfort and happiness.

For two days we were kept here, and then the doctor informed me that we were for transportation to Germany. Everything was hustle and bustle, getting us ready for the journey. German orderlies flying here and there with stretchers, and handling us in as rough a manner as possible, I

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suppose as a way of making us feel really miserable. I was given an old shirt all stained and stiffened with blood, by the colour of it, and by its condition the wearer must have suffered its use for months. It was positively walking with vermin. I objected to it, but the German orderly said: "Take it, or none at all." I could not transform myself into Adam and go out naked, and after some words of encouragement from my Lieutenant, who said, "Stick it, Doitsh; you will get another in Germany," I suffered its adornment. It is needless to tell my readers that this article of apparel did not add to my comfort.

All told, 120 prisoners were taken to the station—of course all wounded, for the unwounded were taken by another train—and our journey to Germany commenced. Our train, which travelled via Belgium, passed through such well-known towns as Namur, Liège, Louvain, and Brussels. We were repeatedly held up at various points *en route* for Germany, for the passage of German troop trains fully packed with reinforcements for the Somme. Men even travelled on the roofs of the trucks. On passing our train, the looks on their faces told us in no uncertain way the expressions they wished to convey as they booed and jeered at us with many uncomplimentary remarks. Such names as Posen, Dresden, and Berlin, painted on the trucks and railway carriages in sidings along the route, showed that we were nearing Germany. The capable and less injured among us on the train were detailed to assist their comrades on the journey, the most uncomfortable it has been my lot to experience. After nearly three days of travelling, we eventually arrived at Cologne and the river Rhine, at Ohrdruf in Germany. Here everything again was hustle; waggon's were waiting



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at the station, and a number of Russian, French, and British prisoners of war were waiting to transport the stretcher cases among us to the prison camp hospital. I and eight others, including my commanding officer, were taken out of the carriage into the pouring rain, which came down in a deluge and wetted me through and through, my only covering being the very much inhabited shirt, the dear creatures evidently preferring to remain with me.

We were put into one of the waggons which had been used as a meat waggon, all slimy and covered with blood and fat, and with a number of these Russian, French, and British prisoners from the camp, who acted as horses, were drawn through the streets of the town of Ohrdruf, with yelling peasant women and children jeering and throwing stones at us as we progressed through the place.

The prison camp lay a distance of three miles away, and it was terrible torture to a badly wounded man to suffer the jolting and jarring of a waggon, travelling over the cobbled roads to the camp. The recollection of it all as I now write chills my blood, and I find my pen quite incapable of painting a true word-picture of it all. The journey must have occupied over an hour, and seemed to me, in my helpless condition, a week. The enactment of this must have been a very crude scene indeed. Onwards the waggons moved with their burdens of wounded men, our fellow-prisoners of war naturally not happy with their lot of being forced to act as horses, but very ready to do all in their power to alleviate our sufferings.

At last the precincts of the prison camp were reached, and I was taken out from the waggon and placed upon the wet ground in the shirt I have already described, and kept there shivering in the

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rain. During this time we were all being counted and taken stock of, and all the general working of a "kultured" German scheme of carrying out such details was gone through. A happy severance from this cruel and abrupt treatment came about when the camp officials approached to deal with my case. For their own convenience, I was relieved of my infested shirt and given another one, of a very much thinner fabric, which did not keep my chilled body warm. But I felt greatly relieved at bidding good-bye to the happy little things that shared the journey with me.

At the next stage I was placed in a huge shed built by the carpenter prisoners of war. It is a great mistake for prisoners of war to state the correct nature of their capabilities, as they are brought into use, to their detriment in most cases. The shed accommodated 300 persons in rough wooden boxes, holding four patients in each, lying side by side. The roof was composed of canvas, and through wear was full of holes and badly torn. The rain came through this and swamped the beds. Outside the prison camp was enclosed with about six different barbed wire fences, parallel with one another, closely guarded by armed sentries. The patients included British, French, and Russians, also some niggers from the French colonies operating with the latter.

Altogether we were quite a motley crew. At this stage of the proceedings, as far as the Germans were concerned, they had finished attending to the wounded. A number of the convalescent prisoners of war were detailed off to attend to the others, and the captured French and Russian doctors had to attend to the prisoners of war from a medical point of view only, the German doctors preferring to perform operations themselves. There

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was great activity among the orderlies attending to the cases, and, settling myself down, I took stock of things in this new home of mine.

The rain beating down upon the bed was very uncomfortable. I was very hungry, and wondered when I was going to get something to eat. Presently a Russian orderly came forward with a basin of what appeared to me to be not unlike bill-poster's paste. Being ravenously hungry, I devoured it, and by the help of a little of the prison black bread, which I will describe later, my hunger to a certain degree was appeased. The floor of the hut showed its filthy condition up very badly. The introduction to it of a river of water and the Sunlight Soap Works would not have made too great an alteration in its appearance. It had never once been scrubbed, and I learnt afterwards it had been erected at the outbreak of the war by the first batch of British prisoners captured at Mons. The orderlies, for lack of accommodation, disposed of all dirty water, etc., along its surface. It was positively disgusting. It was in this building that 200 patients died from exposure the year before the time I now chronicle. The wind that accompanied the rain howled and spent its terror upon the canvas roof, which kept up a continual flapping this way and that way, and rendered the inside of the place decidedly bleak and a very miserable place to live in.

The sanitary arrangements which led off from this shed ran down a cement passage-way, and were a series of pits dug well down into the earth. The seating accommodation consisted of rough poles, direct from the trees, suspended over them. The stench from these was abominable, but as the German officials had not to live in such an atmo-



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sphere, what cared they? The prisoners of war had the unsavoury job of emptying the pits once weekly, and carting the contents out and spreading it on the adjacent ground for manurial purposes.

Early that evening I fell asleep, but was disturbed the whole night through by the moanings and sufferings of the inmates, who had been enduring great pain. I must say the Britishers battled with their wounds well. I must also give the niggers praise in this respect. Early the following morning I was taken into a room apart from the shed and examined by a Russian doctor, who after a close scrutiny of my wound placed a note in my hand, and informed me that I should be operated on at twelve o'clock that day. The operation saved my life, as gangrene had set in and no time had to be wasted, or I should not have been here to write my experiences as a prisoner of war.

At twelve o'clock that day I was in the operating theatre of the German section of the camp, and, after being placed upon the table, put the same question to the German doctor who faced me as I did at Le Cateau: "Are you going to give me an anæsthetic?" To my intense relief, he answered in the affirmative.

The next stage of my experiences brings me to the time when I came to from the effects of the drug. A corporal out of one of the London regiments was the first to greet me. He had been watching my interests, and saw that I came out of the anæsthetics safely. I missed my belongings, a watch and paybook, and upon his journeying over to the operating theatre to inquire for them—they had been left upon the stretcher—the doctor explained my case to him. I then realized that my leg had been amputated above the knee.

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The hard bed I was placed upon and shared with three others was as I have described elsewhere. Being a severe case, a mattress composed of canvas and stuffed with wood shavings was allotted to me. The bigger pieces had an unpleasant way of poking through the canvas and making themselves felt. It is needless to add that the patient who is compelled to lie in bed for any length of time soon develops the most terrible kind of bedsores imaginable, and in such cases the German doctors are unmerciful in the use of the knife. I have seen incisions 12 inches long which have been made for quite small sores. In many cases the patients have died. For myself, I was determined to fight against this evil, and within three weeks of my operation got out of the wooden structure, which the Germans called a bed, and in the interim frequently got out of it and sat on the floor to ease my back. Very few amputation cases survived the ordeal, and I was the only case along my row that lived.

One particularly pathetic case was that of one of the men of a London regiment, who appeared for the first three weeks to be doing nicely. He informed me that he had been married only the Christmas before, and had spent five days with his wife. One day the German doctor, hearing that he had some very bad bedsores on his back, ordered that he was to be sent over to him. He came back with half his posterior cut away. He was put into a hot bath for the two succeeding days for about half an hour each day, and then set in a succession of vomiting periods. The following day he died. The French doctor did not know which of the two things could account for his death: either he caught a chill from the baths as he was brought back from them wet, or he had

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been given chloroform after having food immediately before the operation. And this poor chap was very popular.

Serious cases need good nourishing food, but this we were denied. When we complained, we were informed that our blockade prevented us receiving better food. But surely the blockade did not prevent them from giving the serious cases proper beds. Germany before the war being the workshop of the world, their factories were full of such commodities.

I was put on what they termed No. 1 diet, and this is the best. The daily menu consisted of the following: 6 a.m., mug of black sugarless burnt barley (a substitute for coffee); 9.30, half a pound of black bread made with potato flour and wood pulp.

I should say, by the amount of wood pulp in the bread, that we were considered to be human ostriches. The quantity served out to each man could be disposed of in one meal, but it had to last all day. Now for the dinner each day. I am loath to tell my readers that I saw more dinner-hours than dinners. This sumptuous meal was served at eleven o'clock each day, and consisted of a ladleful of cabbage water. This was made from boiled stalks of cabbages. 5.30, a ladle of what our boys termed "maggoty." It appeared to have a lot of maggots floating on the top, but, to give it a better description, it was more like billposter's paste, and frequently was nicknamed in this way. Not one of us could ever fathom what ingredients this dish was made from, but it was decidedly unappetizing and very insipid in taste. I could never stomach this, no matter how hard I tried, but I found that I must eat it or starve. How I envied those of my comrades who were in the land of



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plenty! It afforded an ironical pastime to tempt one another's appetite with the mention of some particular dish or other. This concluded the day's menu, and if one moved heaven and earth a person could not obtain a morsel more. Hunger has kept me awake for many a night.

As for meat, we were served out with about 1 ounce of horseflesh once a week. I could never relish this, so gave it to my bedmate, who was always hungry enough to eat anything. I have sometimes shared with him the collectings of the dustbin of the German ward in the shape of potato peelings, to help to appease my appetite. At the time I wanted food so much, parcels were not available.

I found that I could place myself in communication with my wife in Africa, and this I did without delay; but, being so far away, it took four months before my better-half could come to my rescue in the way of a parcel of foodstuffs, and the S.A. Comforts Committee got into touch with me and did all they could to alleviate my sufferings. When parcels did arrive, they were kept back, the excuse being for censoring purposes. In my case the tinned meat was removed and kept back by the Germans.

The convalescent patients, as I have already mentioned, were detailed off to nurse us. Most of them had no previous training in this work. Our cases, of course, were naturally neglected. I myself should have been bandaged once every day, but it was carried out only once every week, and no proper bandages were allowed them for use on us. Their excuse was that they were short. They brought into use all the bandages they had come into possession of on the Russian front when they captured a big haul of medical supplies. The

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

Germans are very clever in making substitutes. The substitute used on us for cotton-wool was white papier-mâché, which answers for wool, but soon disappears. It amounted to this in all cases: If a man were tough enough to withstand the hardships, he deserved to live. I was scarcely able to crawl along, when I was compelled to traverse a cold and draughty passage to the dressing-room. There were no facilities offered where a man could have a wash. I have been without for ten days at a stretch. When a patient was able to get up and about, he could not go without the precincts of the ward and the outer place set up as a latrine. No clothing was offered us, as the supply was limited, and, out of 400 patients in a hut, I have seen 300 going about with just a blanket on them to hide their nakedness. No boots, but bare feet, and all this and a filthy floor made us nothing more than human pigs. These conditions naturally made us feel depressed, especially in our weak state.

The first fortnight after my amputation two orderlies came along, and said: "You are for a bath." Both had hands very black, so I objected to their handling me. However, they pulled me out of my bunk and carried me to the bathroom outside. I persisted in my objection to their washing me with those hands; at the least they would have done further damage to my wound. So I asked to see the doctor. Upon his arrival I explained the case to him, and he attended to the removal of my bandage himself. But after I had had the bath there were no towels, so I had to dry in bed. After I was up and about, I happened to be sitting beside one of my fellow-prisoners of war, a private in the Royal Irish Rifles, who had been rendered deaf by the explo-

## How I was taken Prisoner

sion of a shell near him when he was wounded. A German doctor came on the scene, and the following dialogue ensued :

*Doctor:* "Vas you vounded, ah?"

*Private:* "Eh?"

*Doctor (in rage):* "Vas you vounded, vas you vounded, vas you vounded—ah! do you understand English not?"

*Private:* "Was . . . blazes! do you think I'm here for the benefit of my health?"

Of course, at this I was simply convulsed with laughter, and was hobbling away on my crutches, when the doctor hauled me back. Sending for a sergeant, he gave him orders to stop my bread ration for three days, as punishment for daring to laugh at a Prussian medico. Upon a subsequent occasion I was in bed, and I saw the same doctor visit one of the prisoners opposite me. I heard him say something about diary, diary, evidently inquiring about the patient's diarrhœa, from which he was suffering. I had to conceal my laughter under the blanket unnoticed, as I could not afford the loss of another three days' bread ration. The very face of this German doctor amused me, as he appeared to me to have a face like a Chinese parson out of work.

It was not often a German doctor came in, but when he did we were all made aware of the fact. There was always something to find fault with, and we all suffered. At times officers holding very big commands came over to the camp to see what we were like, with amused expressions on their faces, behind which one could read contempt. What they thought of us compared with what we thought of them leaves a mighty big balance in our favour. After a couple of months of this frightful existence, and weak from the lack of



## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

nourishing food, a happy piece of news was conveyed to me. And it was to this effect, that all the prisoners who had lost a limb would be returned to England in exchange for a similar number of their limbless prisoners in British hands. This information put new life into me. I was informed that the exchange would take place early in October.

I lived through every moment of the time till then with visions appearing before me in the hours of wakefulness, and also in my dreams, of a happy return to the homeland and being once more in the land of plenty; but when the day came names of limbless men were called out by a German official, and to my utter astonishment my name was left out.

Upon asking the officer concerning this, he ordered me away, and I found out the next day I had to forfeit another six days' ration of bread for approaching an official other than by the recognized channels. I was afraid to speak, but told my trouble to the French doctor.

After a heap of questioning, the authorities informed me that a Swiss commission would be round in the course of a few weeks, and my case would be considered.

When the time arrived and the commission saw me, my case was gone into. The next day I was informed that I would be for England with the rest of the batch. On a form that was given to every eligible case for repatriation, full particulars had to be filled in.

The next day a blizzard set in; the snow came down in great big flakes, the hut felt extremely cold, and everything appeared as cheerless as it is possible to imagine. But one soul felt happy within that building, as I had been ordered to pre-

## How I was taken Prisoner

pare myself for the homeward journey three days' time from then. The eventful morning arrived. I could not sleep a wink the night previous owing to the excited state I was in. I rose at 4 a.m., as I had to be ready in the enclosure of barbed wire by the gate an hour later. With a handshake all round to the lads I was leaving behind, for they were interested in my good fortune, and with a wish extended to each of them that they would have the good fortune to follow me soon after, I set foot out of hell on my road to heaven.

### MY BLACK BEDMATES

When I awoke from the effects of the operation, I found myself lying next to two French Senegalese negroes. Well, not having slept with niggers before, I did not feel exactly comfortable, and my South African readers can imagine my feelings.

But, after all, they were fellow-prisoners and our Allies; and although their skins were black, the blood that coursed through their veins was the same colour as mine. With this thought, I tried to make their lot as pleasant as possible. Of course, to awaken in the morning and see two faces absolutely as black as pitch made me wonder if I had had a nightmare in the night. I nicknamed one Smiling Sambo, and the other Dusky Joe.

They could only speak French so I found it very difficult to make them understand me. The prison authorities gave these two dusky warriors of France a very bad time indeed, but in respect of their treatment I was powerless to help, though it made my blood boil to witness it. Although I

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

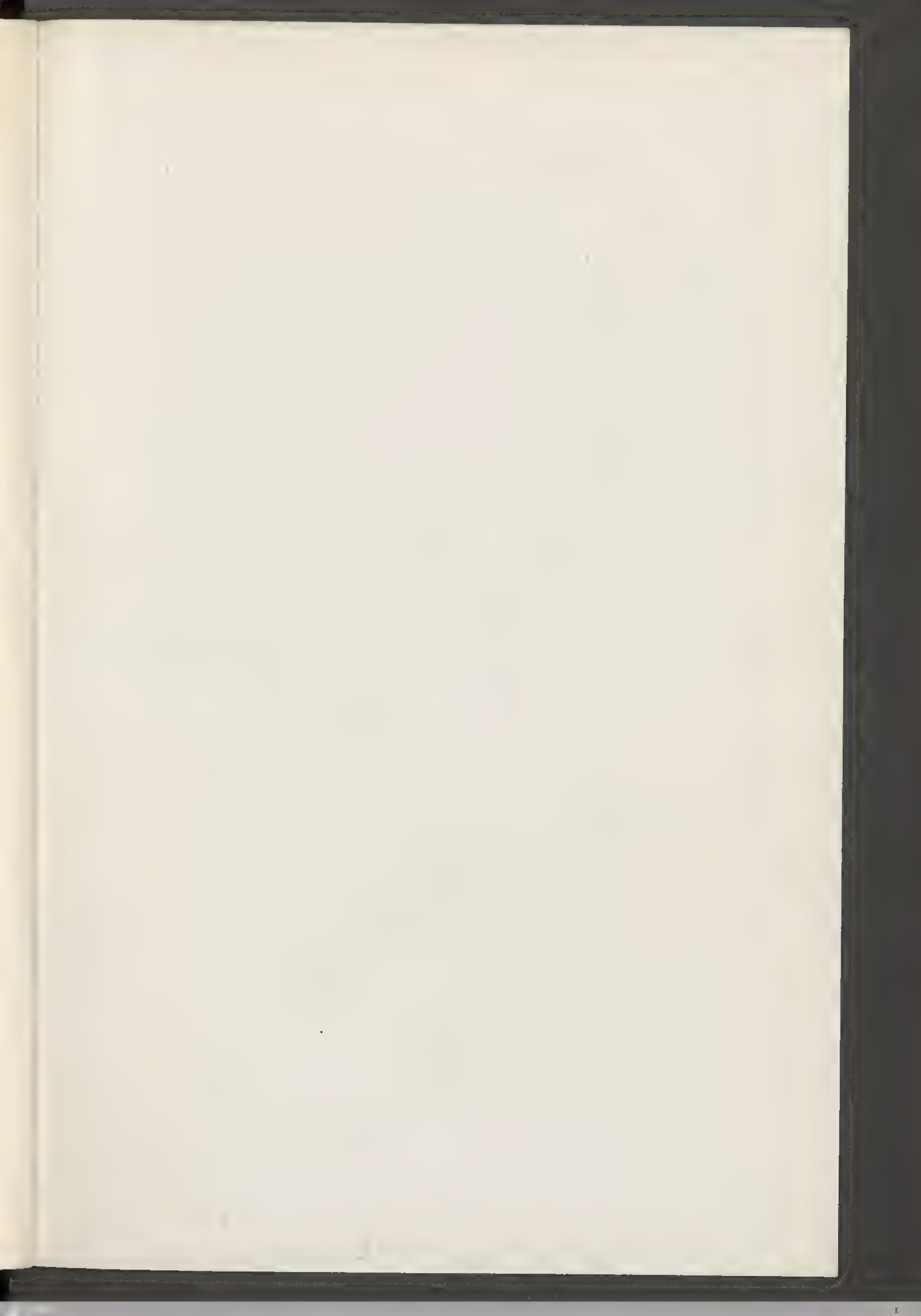
was starving myself, I could afford a mite to these two who received nothing but cold water. This state of affairs went on for four days. Both were very badly wounded, but, being naturally tough, were able to stand their bad treatment. I taught them some very flowery words of the English vocabulary, that one would not call quite parliamentary, but which would aid them in giving vent to their feelings to their oppressors should they so desire.

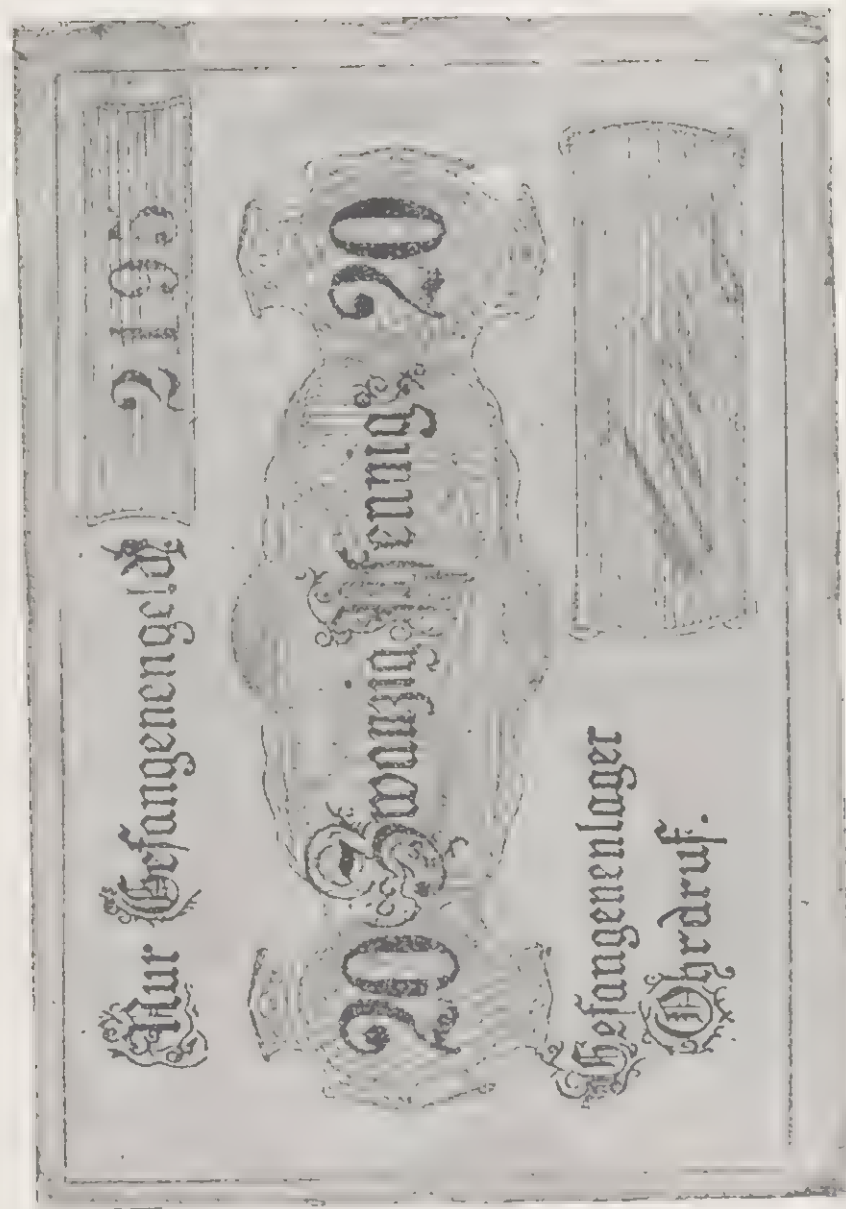
Dusky Joe proved rather intelligent in this respect, and one morning I heard him practising on a German sergeant, who had previous to the war spent ten years in England. Well, I did not do him a good turn, and it is needless to relate the fact that he remained in hospital longer than he expected, and I must say I consider him lucky to be alive.

During the month of August it never ceased to rain, all but one day. The crops in the vicinity, almost ready for the harvesting, were noticed to be lying flat, and the out-of-season rain had spoiled them. This, I learned, was not only the state of affairs throughout Saxony, but a greater part of Germany. A few days prior to my leaving I was allowed the privilege of a little exercise in the grounds of the enclosure. One afternoon I was passing along the wire fence behind the huts, when the German sentry beckoned me to come to the wire. I went over to him, and he asked me in good English how I liked it inside. I told him in very forcible language what I thought of things. He told me he quite agreed with me, and said: "I would like to tell you a little of my experience."

He unfolded the story to me that for fifteen years prior to the war he had a baker's business in

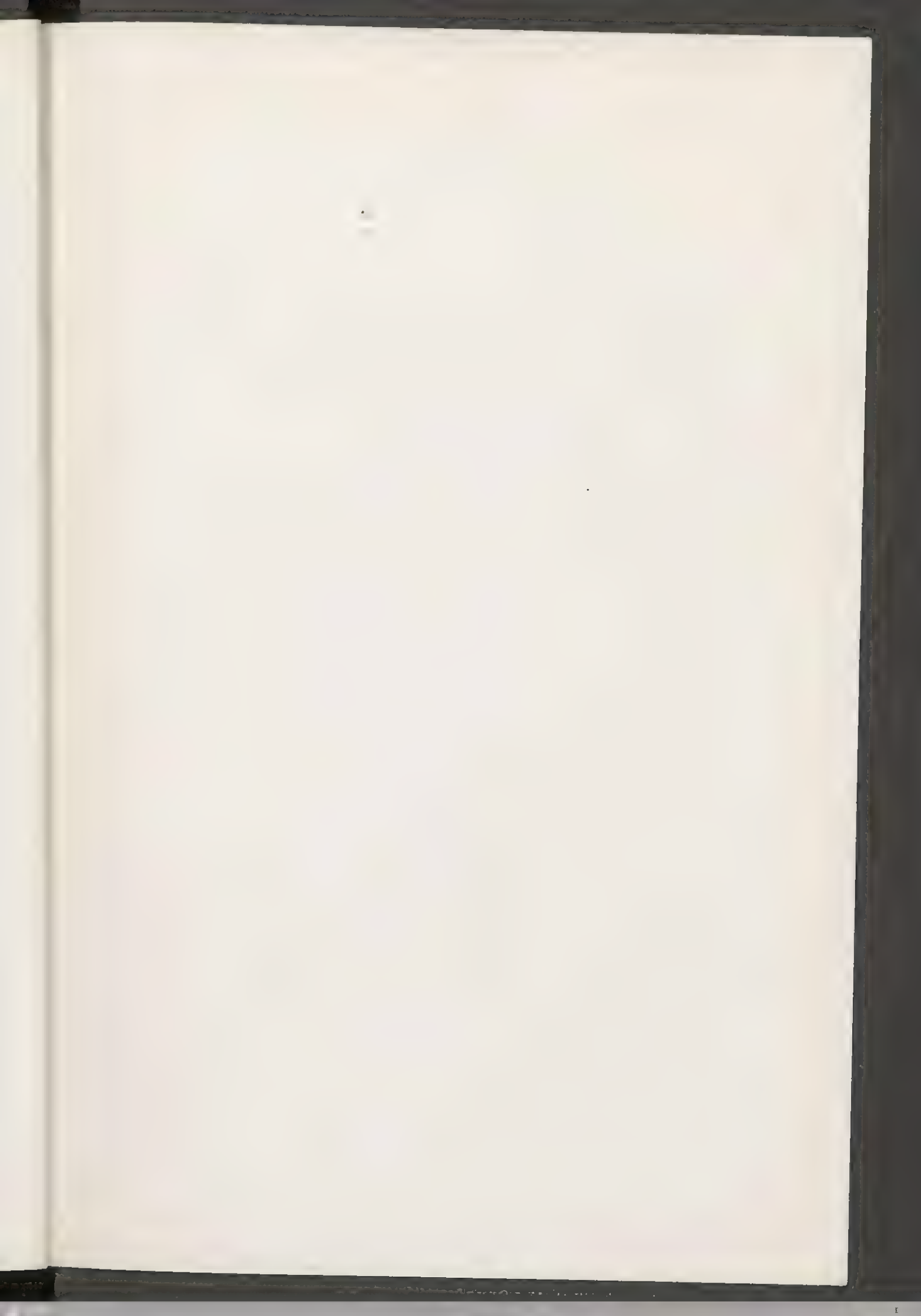






PRISONERS' CAMP MONEY NOTE.

*Between pages 96 and 97.*





Nur Gefangenengeld

510/44

50  
Fünfzig Pfennig  
50

Gefangenenerlager  
Langensalza.

PRISONERS' CAMP MONEY NOTE.

Money that was sent through to prisoners by comfort funds, etc., was kept by the Germans; these notes were issued, and were of value only in the camps.

## How I was taken Prisoner

London. The war broke out, and he was interned in England. Showing symptoms of tuberculosis, he, together with his wife and family, was exchanged and sent back to Germany, and he felt disgusted to find the way in which they dealt with his case there. They put him into uniform, and there he was doing daily duty over the prison camp. He informed me that, although he was born a German, his sympathies were entirely with Britain, and he wished only that he had been allowed to remain in England and carry on his business. He swore to me that, if he were ever drafted to the trenches—and he had been told he would soon have to go—it was his intention to desert and be in hiding until after the war. He gave me some very interesting facts concerning the inner life of Germany and what is taking place day by day, and lent me a diary he had been keeping.

He asked me if I could assist him with some food, and, having some bread that was despatched from Switzerland to me, I gave him a loaf of it. We met again the following afternoon, and when he heard that I was for exchange he joined in my jubilation at the prospect of getting home. Whilst we were in course of conversation the bugle sounded, and great consternation set in in the German camp immediately to our front, on the rise of the grounds. Two huts in the camp were well alight; regiments of Bavarian troops that were there on the training-grounds not far distant (and I may as well mention here that Ohrdruf is the principal training-ground for Germany, as Aldershot is in England) were ordered to put out the fire.

The practising of night attacks over the system of training trenches in the vicinity of the prison

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

hospital is rendered hideous at night by the noise of the machine guns, bombs, and rifle grenades, the star-shells lighting up the sky, and all this throughout every night in the week barring Sunday.

After a great deal of trouble the conflagration was kept well under control. The cause of the fire they put down to one source—viz., a spiteful piece of work on the part of the British prisoners employed in the camp. And when anything like this happens all British prisoners are made to suffer. In this case it was discovered to have been brought about through the carelessness of one of their own sentries, dropping a lighted cigarette among some straw, but the British prisoners suffered.

Just below this camp, and immediately in front of the hospital, is to be seen a patch of ground newly dug up. This spot indicates the ground wherein lie the remains of fifteen Belgian prisoners of war. For striking a German sentry they were immediately shot and buried where they now lie.

It was a source of amusement to the civilian population, especially of a Sunday, to hang around the enclosure, and to gape and stare and jeer at those of us who were permitted to go out into the grounds for a few hours. They seem specially taken up with the Senegalese natives in captivity. The way in which they stared at us made me think that they had never seen an Englishman before. One thing I am pleased about, and that was that I could not understand their uncomplimentary remarks uttered in German. We had to simply grin and bear it.



## CHAPTER VIII

### AT THE PRISON CAMP AT LANGENSALZA

LANGENSALZA, in Saxony, is the principal prisoners of war camp, of which there are over a hundred throughout Germany. I left Ohrdruf at five in the morning on December 2, 1916, and we were all placed in a furniture waggon for the station. This was the happiest moment of my life. Reaching the station, we were hurried into fourth-class compartments, very uncomfortable for a man with a leg missing and feeling very weak, and put among the soldiery returning from or going on leave, and again subjected to more jeering looks and remarks, the escort over us not in the least interfering on our behalf to try and prevent this.

A distance of 20 kilometres brought us to the station of the town of Langensalza. On the road to this station I could observe Russian and British prisoners of war on the lands under the dictatorship of the German women. The sentries were posted in various positions. There appeared to be plenty of activity, especially at the station of Gotha, a large town where I observed female labour being employed solely in the working of the station: female porters, females in the signal cabins, female ticket-collectors, clerks, and all other positions held previous to the war by men. This applies to all the railway-stations passed through throughout the different railway journeys I made.

On arrival at this busy centre we detrained, and were hustled off the platform into a waiting farm

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

waggon. If any of my readers have ever seen these rough-and-ready waggons, they will fully appreciate the fact that they are most uncomfortable conveyances to travel in, especially when one has lost a leg. Ten men were bundled into each, and the extra bad cases, lying down, were placed upon small parcel trollies. The whole of these were drawn along the streets of the town to the prisoners of war camp, some four miles away, by a number of British, French, and Russian fellow-prisoners, amid the jeering of the crowd of men and women who gathered around the station, and of the casual passers-by in the streets. This did not tend to make our lot a very happy one, but as I knew these different stages of the journey would eventually lead to Blighty, I felt I did not care if it rained bricks.

My seat was an old box, and through the rough state of the cobbled roads and the jolting of the waggon my injured limb caused me awful trouble. When the camp was reached, I gave a sigh of relief, though I felt very bad indeed and done up. Some of my companions had almost collapsed through it all.

We were kept in these waggons for over an hour, and then put into a huge shed in which bunks were set up for us to sleep in. I have seen better pens in cattle-yards than these that were placed at our disposal. The inside was far from cheery. The wooden structures that were for our beds were all whitewashed, and reminded me of a fowl coop. I learned that we should remain here for seven days, which eventually turned out to be nine days. Feeling ravenous from the train and waggon journey, I anxiously awaited the arrival of food. This was eventually brought in to us in large tins, and what the mixture was I could not quite fathom.

## At the Prison Camp at Langensalza

I first noticed some white specks which looked like seed, and which I afterwards discovered were a fish's roe. This was mixed with rotten potatoes, cut up into slices and in their jackets, and some sliced onions. It was very bitter and smelt objectionable. Hungry as I was, I could not eat it. After the second spoonful I began to vomit. The rest of the men, after making an attempt to swallow some, also gave it up as a bad job, so we remained hungry. It was nine days of suffering, as by leaving the camp we had cut ourselves off from parcels.

Their object in bringing us to this camp was to make this the centre of collection for all prisoners for exchange. The number that journeyed with me from Ohrdruf was thirty-five. The following day fifteen arrived from the prisoners of war camp at Göttingen in Hanover. Following upon this a few arrived from the camp in Berlin, some from Cassel and other camps. At this particular stage we did not wear the drawn, careworn, and half-demented expression of the prisoners in the camp to whom freedom from this life of exile and torture, unhappily, will not set in until peace has been declared. We were greatly comforted by the anticipation of a speedy return home.

The prisoners in the camp looked upon us with envy, and expressed their thoughts in no uncertain manner at the good fortune awaiting us. My heart went out to these miserable men, most of them being those who had been detained in Germany since 1914, and were captured in the retreat from Mons. It is seldom that the Germans manage to get hold of British prisoners, and it is only in such cases as a big push that men, unhappily, fall into their hands. These prisoners were anxious to know all the latest news and to



## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

hear what progress we had made. Bright, strapping, and intelligent men were now reduced to almost lunatics by the bad treatment meted out to them. No creature comfort whatsoever, and if it had not been for the parcels of food sent them—well, none would have lived. The camp was found to be highly insanitary, and filthy in the extreme. It was at the camp of Langensalza that the big epidemic of typhoid fever broke out, mainly among the Russians, and the sight of a huge burial-ground, in which the names of the departed ones and their nationality are depicted on crosses made of wood, witnessed while on the route to the camp, bears evidence of the great havoc wrought.

They told me some hideous tales of how they were treated. At the time of capture, and in some cases after being without boots, they were compelled to go out and work in the snow. The food was inferior, and the bread allowance was a pound loaf between five men. They were all ravenously hungry, and in some cases this extended over twelve months, until the parcel system came into vogue. How they suffered only their looks could tell; no one could imagine the actual thing. Oft-times I found tears had come into my eyes unconsciously at hearing what they had to tell me. Most of them were afraid to go to the latrines in the dark, as danger lurked about. Men have adjourned to these places in the dark, and have been met and stabbed by a German on their leaving. In the course of their work they were subjected to a taste of the butt end of a rifle, and did not know when they were doing right or wrong. They could not understand German, and did not always grasp what was required of them. They rose at five in the morning, and finished at about the same time at night. To be entirely at

## At the Prison Camp at Langensalza

the mercy of these fiends in human attire beggars actual description. Some were cripples and unfit for hard work, and yet were forced to do it, suffering very badly. Their clothes, marked with a huge white cross running down the back, were in holes, and no facilities offered them to put them in repair. At times they found themselves in rags. No means for keeping themselves clean were offered, and each man was exceedingly verminous. To crown all, pigs were kept here for the creature comfort of the German authorities, who took good care to give the camp a wide berth, taking up their own residences, in some cases, miles away. The pigs were sent into the camp to roam about at will. This was considered the right thing for the "swine Englander," the favourite name bestowed upon all British prisoners.

It would fill a volume in itself to tell of all the indignities these brave men had to undergo, but a day of vengeance will come when matters will be squared. Men are daily being taken from the camps to work on the land. Just before I left, prisoners were under orders to be ready to leave for the Eastern Front to dig trenches and repair roads for the military. Three days prior to our departure from Langensalza the Minister of War came to see us. He was a tall elderly man who wore civil attire, the first official I have seen in Germany out of uniform. He possessed long whiskers at each end of his chin, and looked for all the world like a goat. Upon his entry into the shed, I overheard some of our boys mimic him with the goaty cry of "Baa!" which greatly amused us all. He said he came to see if we were all bad cases and fit for exchange. After a close examination, he kept five men back and ordered their removal. I think I should have died upon the

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

spot if I had been chosen as ineligible. Although I had got so far towards my happy return, a haunting fear possessed me. At last the day came for our further progress. I thought, this place being the main camp, and having been passed by the Minister for War, my fear of being kept back was at an end. But no; German thoroughness went a little farther, as I afterwards learnt. At five in the morning we were hurried out of the place, still under a strong escort. Limping and crawling, we traversed the passage very willingly to a siding by the camp, and were placed in fourth-class carriages, again under an armed escort, and proceeding to the station, where we were attached to a passenger train.

After a forlorn journey of two days, in which we made a brief stay at Cassel, we arrived at a place called Aachen, a large town of 25,000 inhabitants. This city is where all needles and pins are manufactured in Germany. We were taken off the train and conveyed to a huge glass building which in pre-war days was used as a zoological gardens, and the building we occupied was that used for teas and dances. It was a very fine, spacious building surrounded by fine grounds. We were the only animals at present in residence. To the German mind we were nothing but monkeys.

Here a strong guard of Bavarian troops was placed over us. The first night here I felt rather uncanny, because, happening to awake suddenly, I saw an armed sentry patrolling past each of our cots, who wore a very devilish look. I kept awake the remainder of the night.

Men who had been sent here on two previous occasions, 1914 prisoners, who had failed to pass and had reached here from the camp of Fiederichs-



## At the Prison Camp at Langensalza

feld, close by, told me that it was hopeless for a corporal to pass the board that here assembled. This board was due to meet two days hence, as everyone that came within that scope had been sent back. I was very worried. I felt I could not eat even had the food here been appetizing. Upon my word of honour, had I been rejected I am sure I should not have survived.

In course of conversation with a corporal of a Canadian regiment, who shared the same fear as myself, we earnestly and secretly put our heads together to devise a plan of escape into Holland, as we were only twenty miles from the border. By hook or crook I meant to get out of the misery of a camp, and I would brave the attempt or succumb to a bullet. I need not inform my readers that the ensuing two days were a great anxiety to me. The morning the board assembled to investigate our cases arrived, and we waited with bated breath the calling out of our names by the German sergeant. Strangely enough, my name and also those of the other three corporals were not called out, and this added to my anxiety. We should know our fate the following day. The members of the board left early in the afternoon. We were informed that we should be given a treat that night in the way of food. They served out two salt herrings per man, and potatoes. A Scotsman sitting next me remarked: "I cannot eat raw fish; this is not the food for a Scotsman." I replied: "It is as bad as giving a German haggis." Salt herring to a German is a delicacy. Well, very few were eaten. The men had to make do with the potatoes.

That night seven names were called out, and these men learned they had to remain in hospital in Germany for further treatment, and possibly a

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

cure. One sad case of shell-shock I considered ought to have been allowed to return, but they kept the poor fellow back. The following morning I rose all trembling with fear, for within a couple of hours from this I should know my fate. Breakfast consisted of dry bread and black sugarless coffee. I made my way back into the main building, and no sooner had I set foot in it than I saw the sergeant-major with a list of the rejected ones, asking them to get themselves ready. The first name that was called was that of one of the corporals walking on his crutches in front of me, and he fell to the floor upon hearing his fate. Then the name of another corporal followed, and I, with face as white as chalk, stood with bated breath. To my intense relief, the list was concluded without my name being called. The list comprised fourteen names altogether. I rested upon my wooden cot, and, feeling relieved, fell into a sound sleep.

At seven that evening we were counted, numbering 119 in all, and I the only representative of South Africa among them. We filed out for the station, and I did not feel quite relieved until we had actually crossed the frontier into Holland, after two days' journey by train, via Brussels and Antwerp. Looking from the train window, the misery prevailing in hapless Belgium was a sorrowful spectacle to behold. German soldiery everywhere. Unhappy women waved to us from the windows in a timid sort of way, evidently in fear that by so doing they would be annoying their unwelcome hosts, parading the streets in helmets bearing the eagle. It was all too sad to look upon, and I felt relieved when we crossed into Holland, and were met at every turn of our progress, through stations and village streets, by smiling faces which

## At the Prison Camp at Langensalza

brought home to us a sense of perfect joy. On account of the late arrival of the hospital ship which would bring over the German cripples, and in which we were to return to England, we were delayed one night in Rotterdam.

## A CIVIL CAMP IN SENNELAGER

A number of British seamen belonging to a fleet of grimy trawlers were unconcernedly pursuing their usual peaceful occupation, when the German Fleet, out upon one of their ventures into salt waters during the earliest days of the war, made them all prisoners and despatched them to Senne-lager. They were simple fishermen engaged in their ordinary tasks. To the German narrow and distorted minds, a man on a trawler was only toiling in the sea for one or both of two purposes. The one was laying mines; the other, mine-sweeping. Each man was submitted to the indignity of having one half of his head shaved clean, one half of his moustache removed, or one half of his beard cut away. The men branded in this manner presented a strange spectacle, and one which afforded the camp officials endless amusement. One has to read a record such as this to understand how thoroughly brutality and bullying are ingrained in the German nature. The French doctor (prisoner of war, and he was only one) did his best to stand between the wretched prisoners and the brutes of German camp officials who were in military control. The greatest offence in Germany is to insult the uniform, which practically permits the latest recruit to take the law into his own hands and to deal out summary punishment with bayonet or



## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

butt, certainly wherever a prisoner of war is concerned.

The one check on the brutality of a camp appears to be a high death-roll, though that does not operate when there is an epidemic of typhoid, as Wittenberg proves; and in other camps it is dodged by sending prisoners *in extremis* to civil hospitals in the neighbourhood. People who talk glibly of a revolution in Germany, a rising of the civil population against the militarists, can have no idea of the military terrorism under which all classes dwell. A German who commits an offence against the uniform or against the State will be shown no more mercy than a prisoner of war. Torture chambers of Wesel prison in August, 1914, which is public property, are evidence against this. The German warders never attempt to correct by words; the rifle is the handy weapon. Consequently, if you are dull of comprehension, your body speedily assumes a zebra appearance with its patches of black and blue.

Even in the days of 1914 the food was abominably insufficient in quantity and vile in character. In fact, the semi-starvation of prisoners of war has from the outset been the approved policy of all prisoner of war camps in Germany. For Germans to declare it was forced on them by the British blockade is a lie.

We hear so much about the German "Will" theory—the will to live, the will to power, the will to victory, etc.—that it is as well not to forget that in the eyes of the present rulers of Germany the worst crime imaginable is "the will of your own." It is crushed unmercifully. The assumption of individuality is laughed at; liberty consists in going exactly where you are told; no man calls his soul his own, because the soul is not recognized

## At the Prison Camp at Langensalza

under the German code, only the body, which is maltreated until its owner becomes an unresisting dumb animal in the hands of his persecutor.

We have to envisage the essential difference in character and nature between the British and German peoples if we wish to arrive at a right understanding of the two nations. The deepest impression that this recital of German prison experience leaves is how entirely the whole German nation is beneath the heel of the soldier, especially the Prussian soldier. There is a good deal told about the cruel punishment of tying to the post for the most trifling offences. It was a form of horrible torture—for the prisoner was so tightly bound as to stop circulation in hands and feet—for three hours, eventually extended to eight hours. Prisoners of war of all nationalities had to undergo this.

Sunday was the day of days preferred for meting out the punishment. The governing reason for the selection of this day was because it offered such a novel entertainment for the gaping German crowds. The public, as already mentioned, were invited to the camp on Sunday mornings to see the prisoners. Young girls and raw recruits considered a trip to Sennelager, on the chance of seeing a writhing tortured prisoner, as one of the delights of the times, and a sight which should not be missed on any account. They clustered on the path on the opposite side of the road, facing the stake, laughing and joking among themselves. The recruits, who openly manifested their intense amusement, cheered frantically when the trussed wretch gave an abnormally wild and ear-piercing shriek of pain. At his moans, groans, and desperate attempts to release himself, the girls would laugh as gaily as if wit-

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

nessing the antics of a clown at a circus, and were unrestrained in their applause. Is it conceivable that such a scene could take place in England at this time in the world's history? One knows that there are religions in the East where prolonged torments are still considered a recognized object of mirth, but we had thought Western Europe had done for ever with this barbarism. One is inclined to ask in dismay: How is it possible in future to treat with a State which not only officially sanctions these barbarities, but actually encourages its officers to play the part of showmen?



## CHAPTER IX

### GERMANY: TWO SIDES OF THE PICTURE

#### NIGHT LIFE

WAR has destroyed some things, and changed others, for the Germans will willingly sacrifice much for victory. But not "Das Nacht Leben" (the night life). Fear for the threatened night life occasions more pain than last year's potato famine. In all the large towns in Germany the police have caused trouble by assailing the night life. Against them is public feeling; their "Nacht Leben" must remain. In Berlin signs of the public feeling is very noticeable. In the thickly wooded and pleasant west end of the Tiergarten, where in June you hear nightingales, and where now you see snow, it is very "night lively"; it hums with humanity. In Prussia policemen are always at hand to restore order. But people laugh, dance, and sing, mocking the police, who also dance, but not for merriment.

The lovers of night life prefer darkness to light, and the meddling Bundesrat, when it extinguished lights last December, did what the night lifers wanted. It issued a decree for saving of burning materials, and they now have dark streets, no sky-signs, no illuminated shops in best London style. Theatres close an hour earlier, and start at 7.30. At ten o'clock, when the theatres close, it is too

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

early to sleep, and the result is a new tumultuous night life in the streets in the darkness. It is this wicked darkness that spurs the police presidents. As long as the light shone and the paint could be seen, no policeman objected. The night life was then a brazen, unalluring thing. Now, when it lurks in darkness, all realize its vice and feel its seductiveness; imagination helps. The darkness creates terrors which you do not see. Innocent faces seem to be painted; laughs, which in the glare of a Patzenhof beer sky-sign were harmless merriment, sound through the gloom like the siren of the Venus Berg; and velveteen bows in housemaids' seven-mark hats seem to be flaunting purple ostrich feathers, which in these days could only be the wages of sin. Strictest of all against the ten o'clock wickedness are Berlin's police. There was an incident in a fashionable café, where a policeman entered, stood erect, and removed from the lips of a distinctly "night lifey" lady a cigarette. For three days newspapers discussed the incident. "Worthy," they said, "of a really correct city like Boston, Mass." A wit declares that the policeman was enforcing the Bundesrat's decree for saving burning materials.

Berlin has now two centres of night life. One, as in peace time, is the Friedrichstrasse. Friedrichstrasse has still the same alluring ladies, but they now parade with Turkish students, who have gone there to study European technical questions, and have discovered that nothing European is so technical as a Friedrichstrasse lady. The other night-life centre is the Kurfuerstendamm, a thoroughfare running right through Charlottenburg, and the home of autocrats and retired army corps commanders. The War Office has taken up for war work seven big Kurfuerstendamm houses,

## Two Sides of the Picture

among them the house of the late Von der Goltz Pasha, and the innocent lady typists who issue at ten (they work twelve hours each day) complain that the Kurfuerstendamm is a bit too alluringly "night lifey." Berlin's radical press attracts the police presidents. It proclaims that, while darkness is always tedious, darkness unrelieved by laughter and sin is unbearable. The field grey ones home on leave are disappointed when they find no gaiety. Put down the lights by all means, is their cry, but turn on the drinks.

## ORDINARY LIFE

The other side of the picture is the most pleasing and real side of the life at present in all parts of Germany. The life of the vast masses and greater bulk of the people is here depicted. These people move in an atmosphere of intense anxiety as to what the future has in store for them, and these are the masses that count. They are taking war conditions in a decided, matter-of-fact way. Uncertainty is written on every feature, and the confident air of 1914 is now superseded by that of gloominess. They realize that the war for them is destined to be a failure, and also begin to realize that the Kaiser and those holding high positions, together with their statesmen and Ambassadors, have been doing nothing but bluffing them all the time. The average German can be fooled for a part of the time, but is wise enough not to be fooled altogether. Much as their hearts are in the war, and a martial training from infancy has instilled this into them, they are wise enough to know when they are beaten. But they are powerless to fight against the decision of their War Lord. Every



## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

face I saw as I journeyed through Germany were these downcast expressions, of forlorn and hopeless anxiety. Misery was depicted in everything that met one's gaze. The women toiling on the land were putting their shoulders to the wheel in grim earnest to save themselves from starvation. They were to be seen in many another capacity than those that I have already described. I saw while passing through and making several stops at large centres, such as Bremen, Düsseldorf, and Cologne, women drawing heavy waggons through the streets laden with all manner of things. Women and young ladies (the Frauen and Mädchen) were digging up and repairing the roads, and they seemed very hardy folk indeed. They are feeling the seriousness of the food situation, helping to keep Germany from the last gasp, and it is a fact that millions of Germans are living on the food supplied by the municipal "war kitchens" (Kriegskuchen) maintained in practically every town and city in the empire. These commercial "mass-feeding" establishments are highly practicable war emergency institutions which are accomplishing three important purposes: conserving the national food-supply, promoting equality of eating, and saving the people's money by furnishing food at a minimum cost. The war kitchens utilize municipal buildings suitable for the purpose, or commandeer private property which can be adapted. These buildings are converted into huge cooking establishments. In addition to the kitchen proper, there is dining-room accommodation for thousands of persons. In another department food is sold for consumption off the premises. Many municipalities, in addition to the war kitchens, operate a system of portable kitchens which deliver hot food at war kitchen

## Two Sides of the Picture

prices to customers' houses. The Berliners have nicknamed these portable kitchens "goulish cannon."

At the end of November there were circumstantial reports that Hindenburg had decided to make "mass feeding" at these war kitchens compulsory for the whole nation. What became of this order I do not know. Germany's potato supply at the commencement of the war was 70 million tons. When I left Germany I found out that the last crop yielded 20 million tons. In pre-war days more than this figure was utilized for distilling purposes only. The German is a past-master in the art of finding a substitute; but, scheme as they will, a substitute for the chief articles of diet they cannot succeed in bringing into being. Their bread consists of a greater quantity of wood pulp intermixed with potato flour, but when this becomes scarce wood alone will not suffice. Two bread riots occurred in Saxony; women and children paraded the streets in great defiance of the military, who were ordered to interfere and disperse the crowds. The soldiers opened their machine guns upon them and shot them down in the streets. This side of the picture is the side that matters. The Germans are anxious for peace. Several Prussian officers who got into conversation with me, and who spoke in fluent English, informed me that they were ready for peace, only, as they put it, "You Britishers do not desire it." One of the guards on the journey down said that his soldier comrades are sick and tired of the war and want peace badly.

## CHAPTER X

### HOLLAND AND HOME

As the train steamed into the station at Rotterdam, a very welcome lady visitor came aboard in the person of Lady Johnstone, wife of the British Minister in Holland, who had motored over from the Hague to welcome us. The good lady entered the train, and her first exclamation, with hands extended to shake each in turn by the hand, was: "Are you glad, lads, to once again see a real live British lady?" With a mighty cheer we echoed our sentiments and our deep approval. A host of kind ladies of Holland followed in her train, and brought us some tasty bits and some comforts in the way of smokes.

Whilst this very happy meeting was in progress, the good lady had approached one of the Dutch medical officers who had taken charge of us from the German officials, and applied to him for permission to provide us with good food; but he was unable to grant permission, as he said, although he was now in charge of the party, technically we were not out of German guardianship until the actual exchange of the two batches of prisoners was brought about. It was here that five civil prisoners, who had been interned at Sennelager, joined us, and I gleaned some valuable information concerning a civil camp from them.



## Holland

After the lapse of about an hour, Lady Johnstone came along and imparted the good piece of news that she had been successful in obtaining permission for her to supply us with some extra food; and we were thereupon allowed to adjourn to the station waiting-room, and were magnificently received by a host of ladies waiting to serve us with a supply of food. Half a dozen eggs, a luxury I had almost forgotten the taste of, a couple of bottles of good Dutch ale per man, and a plentiful supply of fancy pastry and a good cake, our creature comfort being further supplemented with a good choice cigar and cigarettes. This spread brought forth a beam of happiness upon the faces of one and all of us.

Two men among us, being blind, were unable to witness the spectacle about us, but nevertheless they thoroughly enjoyed the reception. I cannot speak in terms too praiseworthy of the kindness shown us by the ladies of Holland. Lady Johnstone imparted all the latest news concerning England; news concerning the world we lived in was always kept back from us. Amid other interesting information, we were greatly astonished upon hearing that Mr. Lloyd George was Premier of all England. When our inner man had been amply provided for, we were bidden a pleasant "Good-night" and returned to the train.

Further delay was experienced owing to the non-arrival of the boat from England; thus it was not until the following evening that we left Holland behind us, a memory of a visit I shall always cherish.

At 8 p.m. in the evening of December 9 there was a merry crowd of R.A.M.C. officers and staff to be seen upon the deck of the hospital ship lying

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

alongside the quay at the Hook of Holland, as we passed along the dock to board the vessel and were received by them with open arms. The returned Germans passed in by one door, and we out by another, each party not seeing the other. And this was a wise precaution. We were assisted on to the boat by willing hands, and adjourned to the ward allotted us on the boat.

After a splendid dinner served us, we were informed that within an hour from then a concert, organized in our honour by the staff, would take place.

It proved a highly entertaining programme, and did not terminate until about midnight. The ladies of Holland had sent down small parcels, one for each of us, on to the boat, and when opened they were found to contain tobacco, a pipe, cigarettes, cigars, sweets, and cakes. The sergeant-major during the interval of the concert addressed us all, commenting upon the fact that the staff of the boat bade us welcome, and while aboard we were to consider that the vessel belonged to every one of us.

It was true he was a sergeant-major, and sergeant-majors are generally known to all men. He naturally expected for discipline purposes we should respect him as such, but also as a brother and a comrade. Any requests on our part would not be too great for him to fulfil; we had only to make them. He echoed the sentiments of the O.C. of the boat. He further informed us that on the morrow a good old English dinner, consisting of roast beef, roast potatoes, and Yorkshire pudding, with a pint of Bass to wash it all down, would be our good fortune.

The skipper of the boat had informed them that, barring submarines, he would break all records on

## The Return Home

the run over to England; and the good ship did so, arriving in good time, after about twelve hours' run from Holland, into dock at Tilbury, where we were met by the Duchess of Bedford and many other ladies, and by a host of Red Cross helpers. An ambulance train awaited us, in which we were comfortably accommodated, served with tea and all sorts of dainties, and conveyed to London. Upon arrival at Victoria a great and unforgettable scene awaited us. I blush to tell you that sweet and charming members of the opposite sex threw their arms about me and kissed me over and over again.

Flowers were showered upon us, and comforts of all descriptions. We then entered private motors and journeyed to the Queen Alexandra Hospital, Millbank, Westminster, where we arrived about 10.30 p.m. Dinner was served, after which beds were allotted, and we retired to spend one of the happiest and most comfortable nights. During our stay here we were entertained on a very lavish scale, and were invited to the mansions of several members of the nobility. Two of the royal brakes, lent by His Majesty the King for use of wounded soldiers, called here each afternoon to take us to some entertainment or other. Private motors called to take us to private tea-fights and theatres; it was a continuous round of pleasure. To spend Christmas in England once more was a blessing. On Christmas Eve for pure devilment, I decided to hang up my stocking, reverting to the time when I was a child and the happy days of Santa Claus. A wounded Tommy is, after all, but a child. I cannot fathom exactly what brings this about; nine out of ten are affected in this way, and it is most noticeable. I expected something in the nature of a good joke being played upon me, but,



## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

to my utter surprise, found a good-sized Christmas stocking full of sweetmeats and other useful articles for a soldier, sent me by a young Canadian school-child of Dartmoor, Nova Scotia. I may tell you that I greatly cherish this among my possessions. Christmas day I journeyed to a private residence in Kensington, and had the Christmas spread of my life. After this we were driven to the S.A. Comforts Committee rooms and entertained, and were introduced to some highly connected people of South Africa, spending a vacation in the Old Country.

I was transferred to the S.A. Hospital, Richmond Park, Surrey, on January 5 of this year. My arrival brought about the return of the first lost sheep out of the South African fold. I arrived on a day with a dull sky—I must say, not Richmond weather, as I have heard that Richmond is a queen of summer. It is her summer aspect that her lovers have delighted to portray in their pages. Richmond, situated in the county of Surrey, with the Star and Garter Hotel, built in 1738, now demolished, but rebuilt as a hospital for the wounded, opposite Richmond Park, with varied scenes, met my eye. The beauties of an English landscape are displayed, and must give the lover of Nature great delight. There are lovely lakes and many magnificent deer here; old and stately trees are in the Park. White Lodge stands in the midst, the birthplace of Queen Mary. Richmond Hill commands one of the loveliest views of the River Thames, and has been the favourite attraction of many of our great artists and painters. It is to the river that Richmond owes its attraction. The joy of the river enters into the life of the people. There is the world-famous terrace, which is noted for its magnificent view of the river. Scott

## The Return Home

is said to have loved this view more than any other, and in "The Heart of Midlothian" he makes the Duke of Argyll say of it to Jeanie Deans: "We have nothing like it in Scotland." It may be that the contrast between the granite crags and rough moors of his own country and Richmond's scenes of verdure made the appeal of Richmond stronger to Scott. James Thomson, the first professed Nature poet of Scotland, loved Richmond in the same way, and made his cottage home here. But now it is full winter. The deer stand coldly in the snow, and the gentle spirits of Scott, Thomson, or Hood, are not suggested by the rude and bracing discomfort of the day. To me, at least, a more tragic and more martial ghost seems to brood over the solitude of the park and of the S.A. Hospital. Three hundred and thirty years ago she lay dying, an old skeleton woman, in the vanished Palace of Richmond, not a stone's-throw from the site of the hospital. She was fighting Death before her Ministers, and it struck her down in the middle of a tense argument as to who should be her heir. It is easy to imagine her valiant, soldier-loving spirit looking in on the Springboks and the bravery of those whose wounds were mortal.

"Scarce had they lifted up life's full and fiery cup,  
Than they had set it down untouched before them;  
They beckoned it to close,  
Close in destruction o'er them."

Thus sings Kipling of two young men who perished for the English Virgin Queen. And to-day Belphebe seems to be whispering in the wind among the park's trees: "By my dread father's soul, many men have prayed to me for life. I have refused them, and slept none the worse after; but when my men, my tall fantastical young men,

## First Springbok Prisoner in Germany

beseech me on their knees for leave to die for me, it shakes me—ah, it shakes me to the marrow of my bones!"

The quiet and loneliness of the outside of the hospital were at once contradicted when I entered the building. For within all was warmth, bustle, and cheerfulness. Round a seasonable fire was gathered a knot of patients, and I at once recognized familiar faces. It was thus a happy reunion. I was met on all sides by a hearty and warm welcome, which at once placed me in good spirits. I was kindly treated by the hospital staff, and am recuperating from my injury under quite a S.A. atmosphere. I am to remain here until I am ready to be fitted with an artificial limb, and after that will come my return home to the land of my birth, the Sunny South.

## A HUMOROUS LECTURE IN BERLIN

Professor Hans Meyer of Leipzig, who is regarded as one of the chief German travellers and authorities on Africa, has delivered a lecture in Berlin on the need for Germany to annex the Portuguese colonies. He says that the first thing Germany must have is Angola (Portuguese West Africa); and she must not only have the northern half of Portuguese East Africa, but further territory south of the Zambesi. Professor Meyer says that Germany's chief "colonial war aim" must indeed be "a connected Central African Colonial Empire, resting on the three pillars of Cameroon, South-West Africa, and East Africa." But "Tropical Central Africa" is not sufficient. Germany must secure her sea-road by the acquisition of naval bases, and she must also have territories which by their production will balance the "colonial one-



## More than Lucky to be Exchanged

sidedness" of Central Africa. The Azores and Madeira, and also the Cape Verd Islands, are "indispensable," as well as Principe and, above all, S. Thomé. Finally, Germany must have Portuguese Guinea.

### WHY I FEEL MORE THAN LUCKY TO BE EXCHANGED

Owing to the new U-boat frightfulness, and in pursuance of their cold-blooded ferocity, the Germans have announced that they were as ready to sink their own incapacitated wounded as they were to sink ours. We are unable to exchange even prisoners who are unfit for any form of service. The only exchanges likely to occur in the immediate future are on a very small scale of invalid civilians. The German attitude in this matter was a further lapse into barbarity. They persistently refused to discuss any fair exchange, and were only interested in the fate of a few highly placed personages who happened to be in our hands.

There is neither sense nor truth in representing, as is constantly done, that the civilian camp at Ruhleben is a sort of unspeakable hell on earth. The military camps are the ones that suffer. There are between 34,000 and 35,000 British officers and men in over 100 prison camps.

Being snatched from the grave, and being home again in humane hands and civilization, is a happy realization far in excess of my wildest dreams.

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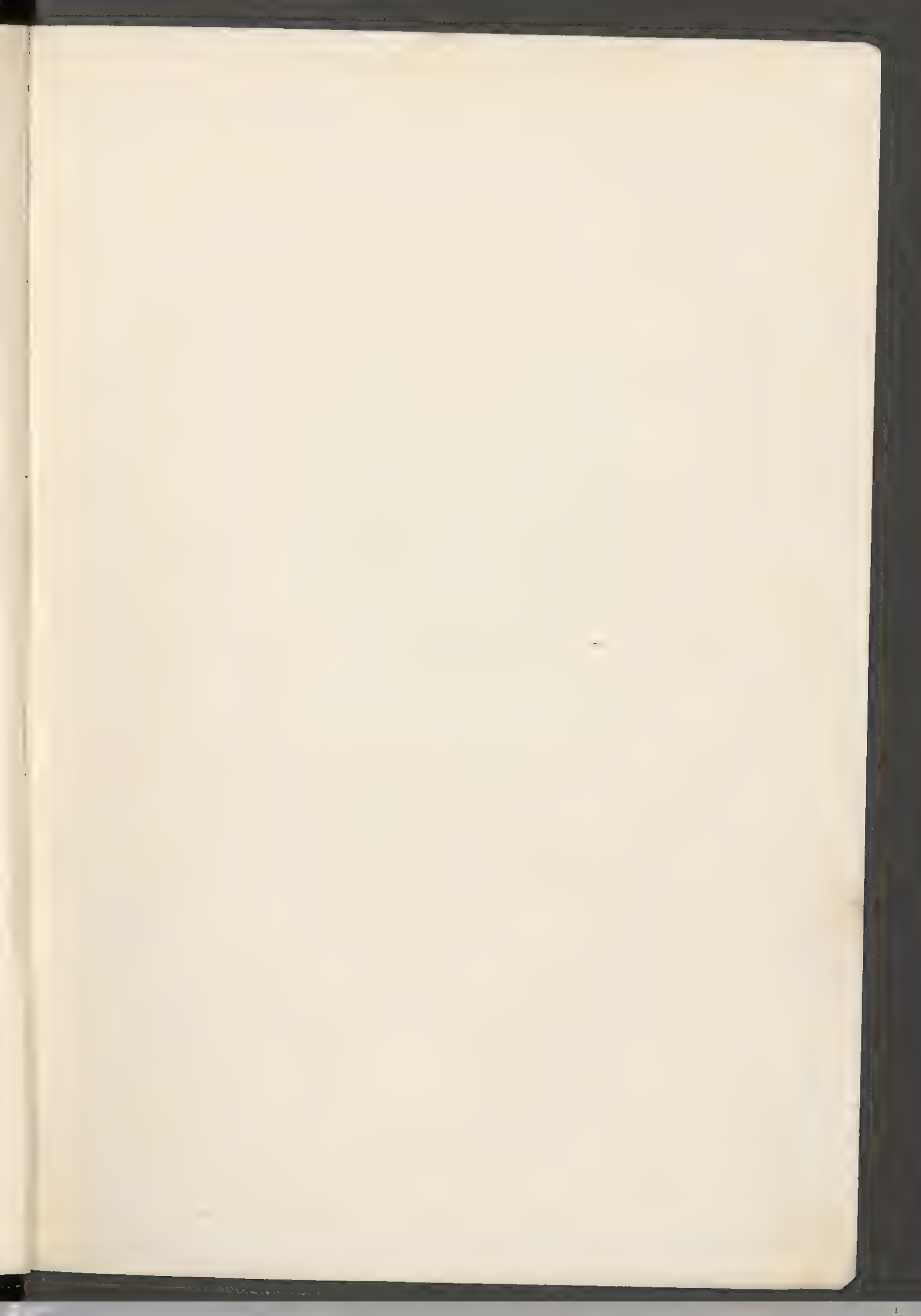
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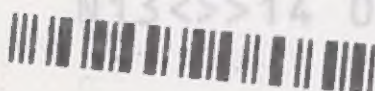
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